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CULTURAL IDENTITY, JEWISH IDENTITY AND THE EDUCATIONAL STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: SOCIAL ANALYSIS AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

by

Linda Allison Bliss

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
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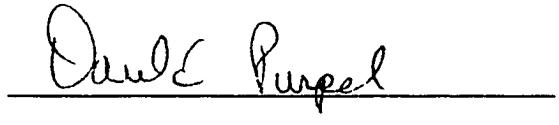

Dissertation Advisor

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This dissertation explores the dialectic between cultural identity and educational policies with particular reference to moral implications of cultural identity. Given the increasing ethnic diversity and economic bifurcation in the United States today, it is important for educators to develop theories and practices which thoughtfully respond to current dialogues concerning issues of cultural identity.

The conceptual understandings which ground the current American educational discourse concerning cultural identity in general and multicultural education are examined through an analysis of the works of Spring, Banks, the Spindlers, Schlesinger, Zinn, Taylor and West. In addition, thoughtful responses require educators to both deeply understand their own backgrounds and perspectives and affirm their commitments to pursuing social justice. Towards this, the dissertation explores personal, historical and contemporary issues of Jewish identity in America. The writer's own experiences are reflected upon within this larger context. This identity is interpreted through the works of theorists of Jewish life such as Bauman, Bershtel and Graubard, Fein, and Pogrebin. Additional guidance, especially concerning the prophetic strand within Judaism, is provided through the work of theologians A. Heschel, Buber and Plaskow. Plaskow, Pogrebin and S. Heschel are among those who

provide related feminist critiques of Jewish tradition and identity. Educators who provide interpretive guidance include Purpel and Simon.

This inquiry concludes with a commitment to integrating the writer's moral and spiritual identity with an educational praxis dedicated to celebrating diversity while affirming our American commitment to fundamental democratic ideals. It suggests directions for educational policy and offers possibilities for action for the writer and other educators.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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My thanks also go to Leonard, my husband and partner in life, without whose love and support this dissertation would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER I

EDUCATION AND ISSUES OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Preface

If anything can be said to be characteristic of this particular moment in time, I believe it would be personal and public attempts to define who we are and what subsequent responsibilities to ourselves and others flow from these definitions. There is, therefore, a moral dimension to this inquiry since it is clearly concerned with the relationships between people. Many people are expressing a strong need for discussing and defining who "we" are as a nation, as "a people", as diverse "peoples" living within a nation, and as "persons" - individual men and women seeking meaningful lives. Related to these issues are both historical and future oriented ones. "What is our history?" "How did we come to be like this?" "What might we do in the future?" "What should we do?" The underlying issues beneath these often rancorous contemporary discourses are serious, they involve basic components of "identity" including how people think about race, region, class, gender and religion.

These issues are being raised at a time when ethnic and cultural diversity is increasing at the very time when trans-national corporations promote and profit from cultural

homogeneity. From these arise tensions between conceptions of what it means to be simultaneously a member of a modern nation and a participant in that "increasingly globalized capitalist system" (Rieff, 1993, p.63). Perhaps most important to these searches are considerations of important connections among all these constituents of identity. Our society is built out of the ramifications of how we make these connections.

As philosopher Cornel West (1992b) points out, we construct our identities from "multiple positions" today, and perhaps we should each consider ourselves to have multiple "identities" (p. 20). In a similar vein, Zygmunt Bauman (1991) notes that each person today is considered to be a member of many cultural subsets, a unit of many meanings, an ultimately "ambivalent compound" (p.95) of identities. These identities may cut across each other, so that the connections people feel to others becomes fluid and situational. The process of making and breaking connections and relationships based on nationality, race, gender, religion or social class is a dynamic one. The modern quest for clarity in issues of identity is fueled in part by the realization that there are real social, political and economic ramifications to how these connections are acted upon in society.

People interested in helping develop an American society that values increased equity and social justice are analyzing the relationships that come from our various social constructions of (cultural) identity. Which opportunities

people are offered and which protections they are afforded are related to public answers to questions concerning cultural identity. For example, West points up the importance of those connections people do or do not make with others, and asks us each to consider both the moral content and possible political consequences of our identities. I endeavor to do this, as I speak from multiple positions within American society. One of my positions, or identities, is when I speak as an educator. I am also the Jewish granddaughter of immigrants to this country. I primarily speak from these positions when I join the cultural dialogue concerning identity.

We are reformulating and reviving questions of choice and ascription, unity and diversity, particularity and universality. Related to recognition of the social construction of identity, there is an emphasis in the discourse on identity towards "[c]hoice and self-creation" (Bershtel & Graubard, 1988, p. 287). People speak of a modern identity that is "peculiarly open" (Peter Berger et al, 1973, cited in Bershtel & Graubard, p. 292); one that has as its given "the sense that choice is open and that authenticity depends on individual choice" (p. 287). One that may have formerly been "destiny" (p.288), "objective and imposed" but that now "has become constructed and chosen" (p.300). However, Cornel West (1992b) points out the limitations of this theory.

West reminds us to remember that people must construct their identities "always under circumstances not of their own

choosing" (p.20). He points out that people seek to construct their identities in order to find "existential meaning" when faced with "terrors of nature, the cruelties of fate, the unjustifiability of suffering" (p.21).

Related to this, West also reminds us that identity is "fundamentally about desire and death. How you construct desire and how you conceive of death...desire for recognition, association and protection" (p.20). "[I]dentity cuts at the deep existential level where religion resides...[I]t's a shaking of the rationalist foundation" (p.21). The need is universal. It seems to me that one of the vital tasks Americans face today is to seriously address more people's "deep visceral [human] need" to belong (p.20) in a way that will bring more social justice to all without doing violence to people's sometimes particularistic needs for affiliation.

West's questions about identity are always connected to issues of justice. When he asks, "What are the political consequences of our various identities?" (p.20) it is to note that "strategies and tactics" (p.22) for binding people, mobilizing them, and organizing them are going to be necessary for any effective social change from the left, and that this will involve becoming more effective at addressing a diverse population's desires and constructions of death. According to West, this means that people's identities may determine not only who they feel bound to, perhaps to the point of death, but who they will kill for, and who they will kill.

In addition, West reminds us that identities get constructed "from above" as well as "from below" (p.22). Identities are constructed within societies, and some people (and groups of people) can greatly influence the impact of particular constructions of identity for those "below" them. The ability to choose racial, class and gender identities is more hierarchically controlled than is generally acknowledged in America today. Author Ellis Cose explores one example of this in his recent book, The Rage of a Privileged Class. In it he explores the confusion and anger of socially frustrated, "psychologically batter[ed]", albeit financially successful black men and women. They reported doing everything they were "supposed to do" in order to be accepted as the middle and upper class professionals they were, only to find "insistent and galling reminders that whatever they may accomplish in life, race remains their most salient feature as far as much of America is concerned" ("Rage of the Privileged" by Ellis Cose in Newsweek, November 15, 1993, p.57). As we learn through cultural dialogue about who we are and what our relationships both are now and ought to be in the future, those with the political and economic power to shape the dialogues can negatively limit our choices by imposing a degree of "identity-from-above." Given the increasing ethnic and economic polarization in the world today, and the perennial American search to establish a society where the people share something of a common culture, it is as vital as ever for those of us with

some social influence to ask ourselves and to encourage others to similarly ask West's second question concerning the moral content of our identities. As we question, perhaps we should remember Martin Luther King, Jr.'s (1963) assertion that no matter where our positions in American society, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality" (p.153) and thus must fight injustice anytime it arises.

Various Aspects of Cultural Identity

Part of the struggle to elucidate the issues within the struggles over present and preferred cultural identities stems from an increasing willingness to recognize and affirm Americans' differences; especially differences in race, religion, ethnicity and gender. This is a relatively new attitude, one has made all questions of cultural identity more complex. This is true, especially in light of Cornel West's injunction to remember that a person's sense of identity is linked to a deep "desire for recognition, association and protection" (1992b, p. 20).

Conceptions of cultural identity are also related to people's particular understandings of what constitutes their "culture". Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983) has written of "culture" as people's "conceptual world" (p.24); a "context" within which their institutions, social events, behaviors or processes might be described (p.14). Culture is created and lived in community. It provides a shared context for understanding the world. Geertz writes, "Culture is public

because meaning is" (p.12). Being human means that we are inevitably beings both suspended in and constantly spinning Weberian "webs of significance" (p.5) together with each other. It is these webs which Geertz considers "culture."

As to how we come to understand our cultures, and our place(s) in them, which I take to be a way of describing cultural identity, I turn to philosopher Charles Taylor. In his 1992 essay, "The Politics of Recognition", he points out that the "crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally *dialogical* character" (p.32). He continues,

> We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. For my purposes here, I want to take *language* in a broad sense, covering not only the words we speak, but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the "languages of art, of gesture, of love, and the like. But we learn these modes of expression through exchanges with others. (p.32)

Taylor is referring to others as people who are important to us when we are young, and how important they are throughout our lives. Our adult conceptions of identity are shaped by the dialogs we partake in, dialogs in the languages we have learned from these people. Throughout our lives, our identities depend on our "dialogical relations with others" (p.34). For Taylor, identity is "who we are, 'where we're coming from'" (p.33). It is the "background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense" (pp.33-34).

Like Cornel West, Taylor is concerned with both the moral content and political consequences of people's identities. The dialogical relations he refers to ought to be based on a mutual sense of respect and recognition, be they between individuals or groups. Taylor is concerned with negative impact on all members of a society, where calls for the equal dignity of all citizens are unmet because of the preemptory withholding of equal recognition from some people based on their gender, race, class or ethnicity. He also points out the conflicts today between those who believe that the best way to ensure universal dignity is to be "blind" (p.39) (or "difference-blind", p.40) to the ways people are different and those people who believe that the best way to be nondiscriminatory is to recognize "the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else" (p.38). This is a conflict which, I believe goes to the heart of issues of cultural identity.

Taylor has much more empathy for proponents of the latter position than do educational anthropologists George and Louise Spindler (1990). They have written extensively about American culture. Their latest book is The American Cultural Dialogue and Its Transmission. It concerns cultural identity because it is about what and who is valued. For the Spindlers, America is a place where this dialogue has been going on since the inception of the nation, mostly among the those in the "cultural mainstream". They point out that "history" has "defined White Anglo-Saxon, North European, Protestant culture as a primary

cultural force in the development of American culture" (p.166). The Spindlers point out that they are in the mainstream by virtue of the fact that this is their personal heritage. However, they do feel the enduring values introduced by this group, "are there for anyone to use, and they are being used" (p. 166). In their view,

> Immigrants and those rising from lower socioeconomic ranks assimilate, appropriate and acquire this dialogue as they become mainstream. This assimilative process will go on, for it is the American ethos, the central process of American culture and society. Ethnicity is not lost but participation is gained. However, ethnicity is reshaped. (p.xii)

The "reshaping" that the Spindlers feel will most positively lead to full participation in the American mainstream is described as "biculturalism." In order to buttress their argument, they chose Henry Trueba as both a spokesman for biculturalism and "the Chicano experience with the American cultural dialogue" (p.120). The Spindlers define biculturalism as retaining

> [S]ignificant identities, habits, and ways of thinking that are certainly not mainstream while simultaneously succeeding in adopting mainstream instrumentalities to their own purposes...[which] for many persons, may constitute viable adaptations to the need to 'get along' in America at the same time that ethnic pride dictates a retention of self-orientation within one's culture of origin. (p.37)

The Spindlers (and Trueba) are generally positive about the process because there is much to be gained by being a full

participant in the American mainstream. They note approvingly that despite the conflict and diversity present in the United States, "[W]e manage a surprisingly high degree of communication" (p.3) and tolerance. In their Final Notes to this book, the Spindlers register their implicit support of what mainstream America has to offer new Asian and Central American immigrants by asserting, "America is still a land of opportunity for highly motivated individuals who believe in the system" (p.166). Their reflections following a cross country visit reinforce their views of America as a place of "geographic immensity," (p.163) "material richness," (p.163) and an enduring American cultural dialogue. (See Appendix Note A for the Spindlers' definition of cultural dialogue.) In these reflections the Spindlers note with pride, "Americans are attempting to do what no one else has done in the pursuit of liberty, justice and equal opportunity for all citizens" (p.167).

Their final thoughts are disturbed, however, at the "perversion of the search for success" (p.165) they also see characterizing America today. They find, "The dialogue is out of balance. The drive for material success is obsessive" (p.166). There are now "glaring discrepancies between our culturally and politically phrased ideals and the realities of life in America for millions of our citizens" (p.166).

What *are* these ideals being "distorted" (p.166), these values being "perverted" (p.165, p.166)? [e.g. "Inequity in America has been created by the dialogue of achievement, of individualistic striving for success, perverted into self-aggrandizement" (p.165).] The Spindlers are clear about what they consider to be the core American value orientations, the ones which mainstream Americans are most likely to hold. These values include:

> [A]n emphasis upon the individual and individualism, upon personal achievement and success gained by hard work, equality of opportunity, the value of honesty (as an expedient best policy), a belief in the openness of the American socioeconomic structure that can be penetrated by personal commitment and hard work, a belief in progress, a persistent belief in the future as a time of promise and positive developments (an orientation that has been...eroded of late), a sociable, get-along-well-with-others orientation. (p.37)

It is noteworthy that the Spindlers conclude their analysis of those values orientations which characterize people within the mainstream with the following comment. "The central tension however, as we see it, is not so much between value orientations as between those who are carrying on the central dialogue and those who are excluded from it and who would like to be full participants" (p.53).

In conclusion, the Spindlers' implicit personal support for these values, lead them to feel that people's perversion of the core American values, into "individualistic, self-oriented success, the successful drive for wealth by individuals

uncommitted to the public good" (p.165) has led to one of the biggest problems we face today: inequity. They decry the disparity they see today between the "mainstream rich and the minority poor [and] between Black and White" (p.165). The Spindlers' basic support of the mainstream values orientation leads them to interpret the problems they see as caused by perversions of these values rather than by anything inherent in those values, a view not shared by all who address contemporary questions of cultural identity.

Varying Perspectives on Cultural Identity

People speak from and hold many different positions concerning cultural identity in America today. Some of this variety in positions is connected to differing conceptions of "our" history. Their views of history both shape explanations of who "we" are and what might be "our" relationships with each other. Howard Zinn and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. succinctly represent diverse elements of this controversy, and they raise different but equally important questions and issues. Their differences may be considered a metaphor for this conflict concerning cultural identity. They are both well informed, thoughtful historians; yet they have very different ideas of our history, who we are, and how we ought be with each other.

For Schlesinger (1992), the history of the United States represents a "reasonably successful" "experiment...in creating a common identity for people of diverse races, religions, languages, cultures" (p.118). He is pleased that the experiment

has worked as well as it has for several reasons. The most important of these is that the United States embodies ideals that are worth striving for. These are the European Enlightenment (or as Schlesinger refers to them) "the great unifying Western ideas of individual freedom, political democracy, and human rights" (p.138).

These ideals have often been thwarted, even in Europe, due to people's "instinctive human reaction" of ethnic and racial "tribal animosity" (p.10) towards people unlike ourselves. For Schlesinger, this is an important point. Nations are not natural organizations like tribes. They are artificial, and must be explicitly and overtly held together if they are to succeed. A bond of common culture and unique national identity must be created and maintained. For Schlesinger, the story of the United States (until recently) is basically the story of diverse individuals uniting, "melting", integrating, striving to become "a new race". He sees waves of immigrants transformed into Americans - goading each other to become "one people" dedicated to forming a single society which is dedicated to living up to those ideals. The ideals "transcend ethnic, religious, and political lines" (p.118) that arouse tribal animosity and create divisiveness. He sees a recent turn from this historical trend, and is disturbed by the ethnic, racial and other group loyalties he finds manifested in contemporary America. The "brittle bonds of national identity" (p.69) may

break, benefiting no one, not even those who have suffered from the "great national tragedy" (p.19) of racism.

In summary, of Charles Taylor's two strands within Western tradition, Schlesinger clearly articulates the position that the best way to enhance efforts towards recognizing people's universal dignity is to be "difference-blind" (Charles Taylor, p.40). There are those who would argue with Schlesinger's belief that the *only* meaningful identity people ought to sustain is their national one. However, given the grisly news concerning ethnic and racial fragmentation of nations the media reports from around the world today, Schlesinger's fears should be given serious attention.

There are some intersections between Schlesinger's position on American history and Americans' cultural identity/identities and Howard Zinn's position. Writing just over a decade apart, they are both in favor of more justice for Americans. They are both appalled at much of what they observe in the current domestic situations, and yet optimistic about the future. However, the reasons they believe first of all, that things may improve, and secondly, what would constitute improvements are quite different. Some of this stems from their historical analyses.

For example, they both note the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, but interpret their significance differently. For Schlesinger, it was an unfortunate time of "waning American

optimism about the nation's prospects" (p.41) that led people to begin looking backwards at their ethnic roots instead of confidently towards their future as Americans. Contrarily, for Zinn (1980) it was a hopeful time. The "ordinary centers of power" (p.581) could no longer manipulate the American people, "for the first time, the Establishment failed to produce national unity and patriotic fervor in a war" (p.581). Zinn was encouraged by the "general withdrawal of confidence from so many elements of the political and economic system" (pp.581-582) because such systems operated for the benefit of the "elites" and not for the American people in general. For Zinn, the American people should be best thought about as the 99 percent of the population that consists of groups of people who have "resented each other and warred against one another with such vehemence and violence as to obscure their common position as sharers of leftovers in a very wealthy country" (p.571). Those of us in these groups are manipulated and participate in the manipulation of others to keep this system in place. We uphold the system either in ignorance of the fact that doing so primarily benefits the one percent of the population who (unfairly) owns a third of the wealth (p.581), out of a misguided sense of loyalty to that one percent. For Zinn, present iniquities will continue as long as we permit "giant corporations, the military, and their politician collaborators" (p.580) to define "America" and thereby exert undue control over

the choices and chances of the overwhelming majority of Americans.

When Zinn examines American history he does not find people coming together individually and voluntarily to form a community, a nation. Instead, he finds "fierce conflicts of interest (sometimes exploding, most often repressed) between conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, capitalists and workers, dominators and dominated in race and sex" (pp.9-10). The present system developed out of these group conflicts, beginning with the genocidal one between the European invaders and the Indians. Should this system break down now, there would be more opportunity for the racial, ethnic and social class groups of people that constitute "Americans" to get together and cooperate in their true common interest, defining "from below" (after Cornel West) what it means to be American.

In summary, Zinn does not present nearly as positive a picture of the American experience as Schlesinger does. America is not as exemplary or united in his analysis. They both search for seeds which might develop into increased social justice for most Americans, but Zinn rejects the view that this will depend on individuals relinquishing all identities but their national ones. His emphasis is on groups of people. Indeed, he finds that throughout our history, Americans' experiences and relationships have *always* reflected their membership in various

economic and ethnic/racial groups. For Zinn, our history can best be interpreted by analyzing these relationships.

Guiding Assumptions: A Personal Historical Perspective

I realize the difficulty in doing history. It is important, however, for me to reflect and show my working assumptions on our history for better or worse - conscious of the problematics of this analysis. It helps me understand current controversies; it shapes my analysis and interpretation.

My understanding is that "our" history began when Europeans began arriving in great numbers in the 16th century, coming upon the several million people already living in the part of North America that has become the United States. The Europeans found people here whose ancestors had migrated from Asia in the preceding millennia; people who had developed hundreds of linguistically, socially and culturally diverse groups. People in these groups often identified themselves as "the people." Their identification "from below" as Cornel West might say was as members of specific groups or tribes. Over the next two centuries they were all eventually conquered, dominated, labeled "from above" as Indians, and excluded from the developing European/American social "we".

Of the many Europeans who came to the New World, the Spanish were the first to develop an extensive empire here, New Spain. For the century following Columbus's voyages they came seeking "God, glory and gold." They defeated and often enslaved the indigenous peoples they came upon, in a pattern of

converting them to Catholicism and intermarrying with the survivors. During the 16th century, the Spanish also brought many Africans to the New World to labor in their Caribbean and South American mines and fields as slaves. Spain became very wealthy from its New World empire. The Spanish empire stretched the length of South America through Central America into the southern part of North America. New Spain was Catholic, tightly controlled from Spain, and not a place that welcomed other Europeans. Nor was it a place where the strength of one's Spanish lineage and the lightness of one's skin ever ceased being prestigious and advantageous.

Spanish supremacy in the New World was inevitably challenged by other European nations. During the 17th and 18th centuries, explorers for France and England came and laid claim to the wealth of the Americas. Traveling the waterways, the French explored much of North America and established a system of trading with the Indians for furs and other things. They effectively lost out to the British by the end of the 18th century, and ended up selling their North American land to the new American government at the beginning of the 19th century.

Their rivals, the British, came to North America for many reasons, and the colonies they established on the Eastern seaboard were varied. People came to them for opportunities that were denied them back in Europe. They came to practice their religion(s), to own land or otherwise work towards financial prosperity. Some came indebted to those who paid

their passage, or as punishment for crimes committed in England. Once free, they could join those pursuing the good life. As well known contemporary visitor and socal analyst Crevocoeur noted, the opportunities in the colonies also drew an assortment of other Western Europeans, especially in the Middle Colonies. There was also a greater degree of representative self government in these colonies than in the more closed Spanish colonies. There were some similarities between the two, however. Like the Spanish, the English both developed policies of defeating the Indians who occupied the lands they desired and bringing in enslaved Africans as a source of agricultural labor.

During the 18th century, the British colonies expanded and flourished. In the last quarter of the century, the colonists worked together to successfully break from British rule. A nation was established which linked the colonies into one nation. It was a nation whose rhetoric spoke of Enlightenment ideas; ideas of equality, liberty and unalienable human rights. They set up a government that was to be responsive to the needs of the people. The people, the "we" the leaders spoke about were men such as themselves, white, Christian, and financially secure. As part of their attempt to find common ground among themselves, they did not sufficiently grapple with the incongruence of establishing a nation based on these ideals that also permitted the practice of holding black people enslaved in order to support its financial security. What they did begin to deal with, as the century turned, were the problems wrought by

the people's strong regional identifications and loyalties which were interfering with the effective conversion of individual colonies into a single nation. Another impediment to sustainable nationhood was identified as any loyalties the numerous new European immigrants retained for their homelands.

In the 19th century, Americans' concern for building a nation included both the building of an American national identity among its citizens and the geographical building of a nation. The former included continuing the efforts to "Americanize" immigrants; uniting citizens North and South after a bloody Civil War; as well as legally incorporating ex-slaves and their descendants into the American "we" after that war. The latter included fulfilling America's self proclaimed "Manifest Destiny" to span the continent and also had an impact on people's cultural identity. The Louisiana Purchase brought formerly French lands under American control at the beginning of the century. Most of the inhabitants of these vast lands were indigenous peoples. The Mexican Cession at the mid-century conclusion of the Mexican-American War brought the people and lands in the northern third of Mexico under US sovereignty.

The diversity of people living in America in the 19th century thus increased through territorial purchase and conquest as well as through immigration and importation. Throughout the century many immigrants came to the United States as it industrialized and became more urban, especially in the North. As European immigrants continued to pour into a growing America

to farm and raise cattle as well as to work in manufacturing, less and less space was accorded indigenous peoples. Part of this conquest of the frontier also included concerted efforts to destroy the native cultures and to replace them with the developing (heavily Protestant, capitalist, European based) American one.

Educational historian Joel Spring (1994) refers to this process as *deculturalization* (p.149). In many ways this process and the imposition of an "identity from above" does not seem to have benefitted the indigenous peoples and other minority groups, particularly African Americans and Mexican Americans. They are groups who have not been as assimilated and incorporated into mainstream society as others. However, it is also clear that for such marginalized groups, in the words of Cornel West (1992a) in reference to the experiences of black people; "their presence and predicaments" have always been "*constitutive elements*" of American life and culture (p.24).

As the 20th century began, immigrants poured in an unprecedented rate. Only Chinese immigration had been limited before 1900, but the increasing number of poor Southern and Eastern European immigrants led Americans who feared the ability of the US to absorb such diverse multitudes to limit all immigration following World War I. It was limited to reflect the ethnic and racial makeup already present in the population. This policy remained in effect until the 1960's, a period that

saw many changes in American society. Today's immigrants are mainly from Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean leading to what has been called "the browning of America." This increased ethnic, religious and racial diversity is part of the impetus for the current questioning about who "we" are and the nature of our relationships and responsibilities to and for each other.

As well as being a time of increasing diversity among the population, the latter half of the 20th century may also be characterized as a time when thoughtful Americans have seriously examined *why*, despite a foundation that speaks of universal equality, the quality of participation and involvement in American life has historically been so dependent on people's "particularities" - especially their race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The Civil Rights movement became the focal point for much national soul searching and questioning of how "we" ought be treating each other. The movement helped generate other movements in the sixties and early seventies. Indeed, concerning this time, historian Howard Zinn claims, "Never in American history had more movements for change been concentrated in so short a span of years" (p.528). Many of them were intended to extend the ideals of equality to include people whose particularities had hitherto caused them to be excluded.

This current questioning has introduced further complexity into conceptions of the American social "we," now being expanded

to include Americans who had been marginalized and excluded. In addition to the Civil Rights movement, Americans were exhorted to join the "War on Poverty" in the sixties, and to change both consciousness and policy concerning women's "place" in American society. Along with this reaching out, there was a simultaneous and somewhat contradictory turning inward as many Americans began to speak with pride in the "we" who shared a particular aspect of our identity. An individual's desire for "recognition, association and protection" (West, 1992b, p.21) might thus lead her to situationally feel that she is part of many "we's." This rather fluid concept of identity, makes for a richly textured (and often contentious) current discourse concerning how to best make America a place where people work towards greater "liberty and justice for *all*."

Global Perspective

This sometimes rancorous domestic discourse I find myself engaged in is taking place in a wider global context that I would have considered highly unlikely, or perhaps even inconceivable only ten years ago. What once appeared stable and static is now rapidly changing, a situation that is sometimes viewed both within the United States and outside it more in fear than in hopeful anticipation. Outside of the United States today, political boundaries of nations are being formed and re-formed in response to how people are answering questions of their "peoplehood"; how they are constructing their identities,

their historical memories and their hopes and plans for the future.

A primary example this is the struggles in which the peoples of the former Soviet Union are now engaged. Without the enforced uniformity of the Soviet government, they must now decide who they are. What does it mean to say, "we" in capitalist Russia, or in Ukraine, or in Lithuania today? Related to these decisions are those of economic, political and social loyalties and responsibilities. The Communist empire is apparently gone; but what shall replace it? There is a palpable urgency to the peoples' attempts to articulate and define their new identities, their new responsibilities to those who live both within their new borders and those living outside but still within the old union.

There are two reasons I consider this situation to be important to my investigations of contemporary issues of identity within the United States. First, it demonstrates the very real possibility of a major world power "disuniting." As the dissolution of the British Empire did after World War II, this changes the "taken for granted" modern world. Second, the United States has lost an entity of opposition, the Soviet Union. Our own questions of identity are made more complex, more ambiguous now that we have to deal with these new strangers, in place of a more clearly defined traditional enemy.

The seriousness of questions of identity are also underscored today by the situation in the former Yugoslavia.

The peoples of the former Yugoslavia are presently engaged in what sometimes appears to be a Hobbesian "all against all" civil war, with Serb, Croat and Muslim people there fighting each other in fluid, deadly permutations. When a sense of nationality could no longer be politically enforced there, people's sense of their ethnic history and particularity has torn them apart. The ways they remember their past(s) fuels their hatred of each other. This is *not* to say that some people there do not (still) identify themselves as neighbors desirous of a multicultural society, only that their voices are being overwhelmed by the din of the gunfire of those whose sense of identity "is enhanced by the removal and annihilation of another" (Roger Simon, in press b, p. 1). Another casualty to the loss of Soviet influence, Czechoslovakia, has come apart peacefully; Yugoslavia has not. The term "Balkanization" returns to our vocabularies with a new poignancy as we engage in our current dialogue concerning the relative merits of historic and contemporary American efforts to deal with ethnic and racial differences.

This is not to claim that the wider context of contemporary American questioning about identity consists only of nations being pulled asunder. Some people are re-evaluating their national, ethnic and racial identities as they attempt to come together in order to re-construct their nation. In South Africa, the "homelands" wrought by white supremacist policies of

racial apartheid are being dismantled as this nation has become transformed. Whether or not the people of South Africa are able to sustain a democratic, multi-racial, multi-ethnic government depends in part on how the people will continue to construct and address questions of their identities.

One final example of the wider context which informs both this, my particular project, and the wider inquiry into issues of identity currently taking place in the United States is located in the Middle East. There officials from the PLO and Israel are struggling to find a way to create a world that includes both security *and* sovereignty for Israelis *and* Palestinians. How Jews and Muslims there describe their past(s) and define their sense of peoplehood will have great impact on the possibilities of peace in their future. Americans, especially Jewish Americans, watch this struggle to make peace with varying degrees of involvement and feelings of connection to the struggle. I will explore some of these connections in greater detail later.

Despite these external situations and internal conditions including increasing racial diversity in the United States, and the apparently widening gap between the haves and the have nots, I do not believe that the United States is in imminent danger of "disuniting". However, I do believe that these conditions lend a sense of urgency to our task of finding ways of working towards an American society that takes seriously its rhetoric

about "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" for all its people.

National Identity

Schlesinger says national identity is safer than cultural identity citing those nations around the world today that are being sundered along ethnic lines. But there is also a problematic about national identity. For one thing, national identity leads people to fight against those across the border. In addition, if nations are as brittle and artificial as Schlesinger says, we then need to examine the concept of nation. Any promotion of nationhood and national identity should be done thoughtfully. In light of these considerations, we should also reflect upon the nationalist pressures being exerted within our society.

In Modernity and Ambivalence Zygmunt Bauman analyzes the origins of modern nations, and why their call to assimilate, to all be the same, is so integral to their maintenance. Bauman explains that modern nations are artificial creations that must function as more organic social organizations, such as tribes, in order to survive. They must *create* community among peoples who live within their territory, their political borders. People must be convinced that the rights and responsibilities accorded to friends must be extended to others within the political boundaries of the state. How should those in power convince inhabitants of a territory to become "us" with these

other residents? "The national state redefines *friends* as *natives*; it commands to extend the rights ascribed `to friends only' to all - the familiar as much as the unfamiliar - residents of the ruled territory" (pp.63-64). The basis of inclusion in this group of natives is patriotism, loyalty to the state that has made them a group. Being a native and being a patriot are intertwined, as neither concept exists independently of the other. Bauman clearly explains how nations enforce this co-joining, and is worth quoting at length here. (See Appendix Note B for details of Bauman's citations.)

> It has been stressed repeatedly in all analyses of modern states that they `attempted to reduce or eliminate all loyalties and divisions within the country which might stand in the way of national unity'. National states promote `nativism' and construe its subjects as `natives'. They laud and enforce the ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural *homogeneity*. They are engaged in incessant propaganda of *shared* attitudes. They construct *joint* historical memories and do their best to discredit or suppress such stubborn memories as cannot be squeezed into shared traditions - now redefined, in the state-appropriate quasi-legal terms, as `our common heritage'. They preach the sense of *common* mission, *common* fate, *common* destiny. They breed, or at least legitimize and give tacit support to animosity towards everyone standing outside the holy union. In other words, national states promote *uniformity*. Nationalism is a religion of friendship; the national state is the church which forces the prospective flock to practice the cult. The state-enforced homogeneity is the *practice* of nationalist *ideology*. (p.64)

Bauman points out that the continued existence of ambiguous resident strangers makes the entire issue of identity loom uncomfortably large for people in the modern state.

Uncomfortable because natives accept as natural their membership in this group. It is not seen as something earned, or achievable through effort, it is something they "are". It is one place where modernity's rejection of ascription is apparently contradicted. I say apparently, because this is possible only after the transformative efforts of making natives/patriots out of inhabitants has been hidden from view. Natives do not have to face the "inherent brittleness of all identity, including that of the native" (p.68) until they have to deal with the problem of the existence of the stranger.

Bauman contends that the way modern nations deal with strangers is to attempt to either declare them enemies, or to assimilate them, make them natives. There is great pressure to stigmatize the stranger, until this ambiguous "other" who has appeared in "our" midst can clearly be identified. If the stranger insists on remaining, then s/he must be encouraged to stop being a stranger, to assimilate and become "one of us", or to suffer the consequences of being considered a foe. It must be made clear to the strangers that the typical promises of the modern nation, for liberty, equality and community are for "us", not for foes, and that those are the only two available categories. It would be a vast understatement to say there are, thus, many pressures on the stranger to assimilate, to cease explicitly embodying this threatening ambivalence. Bauman refers to the call for assimilation as "arguably the most

specifically, authentically modern of the nation-state policies" (p.69).

Bauman feels the most appropriate definition for assimilation as it has been practiced in modern times is "making alike" (p.102). There is a sense of converting, as in a biological organism who absorbs other substances and makes them identical to and part of itself. These actions are taken for the survival of the organism, not for the benefit of whatever is being absorbed. It is an unambiguously unidirectional process, as the organism is not expected to change as a result of the absorption. In a sense, its life depends on uniformity of substance and the ending of difference and its link to the other.

Bauman feels that the time of modernity has passed, and that this is somewhat unfortunate because modernity held promise, as well as threat. It promised a better life for people, an increased sense of social justice. It was unfortunate that the system depended on a strong state, one capable of large scale social engineering, however. Such an arrangement of power was an integral part of this promise of progress; the state simultaneously promoted a sense of responsibility for others in society and fueled the push towards uniformity.

More than from anything else, modern designs of global perfection drew their strength from this horror of difference and impatience with otherness. And yet they also offered "a

chance for genuine concern with the plight of the wretched and miserable" (p.257); that it might be made better than it was, making each case of individual and group unhappiness into a societal challenge and task.

As long as the decent life of everybody was, by common consent, a feasible proposition, the "administrators of social order felt the need to apologize for their sloth or ineptitude in bringing about a decent life for everybody" (p.257). Bauman decries the change from this to what he senses as a contemporary withdrawal from this type of social commitment. He does *not* miss the drive to obliterate ambivalence, the drive to assimilate that was "on the front line of social engineering, the cutting edge of the advancing order" (p.149). This could be oppressive, especially when the promise of assimilation was not a genuine one. He finds the "toleration" of distinctiveness and difference he sees today to be a step in the right direction away from the ill effects associated with assimilatory efforts, without it necessarily being a step towards establishing societies where people respect and feel responsible for each other. Tolerance can "degenerate into the selfishness of the rich and resourceful" (p.259) when it is based on the idea that people's poverty or marginality is due to poor choices they have made for themselves. To tolerate how someone lives differently from oneself is neither to necessarily make connection to that

person, for instance, to imagine walking in their shoes; nor to truly value their ways as well as your own.

In addition, Bauman writes that people don't fit into one neat category today, "one single subsystem of society." Echoing West's "multiple positions" he points out that each person today is a member of many subsets, a unit of many meanings, an ambivalent compound, always a "partial stranger" (p.95).

Given all of these conflicting forces, two important tasks facing us now are both how to understand (personal and group) cultural identity and how to create communities. To be more specific, the second task is how to build communities of solidarity which not only meet people's needs for "recognition, association and protection" (West, 1992b, p. 20) but also nurture a strong sense of responsibility among the members for addressing the ills of society, reversing a recent trend to tolerate and thus "desocialize" or "privatize" them (Bauman, p.261).

The Role of Education

Belief in equality and inalienable rights are part of American society's core values, although there is disagreement as to how best interpret them and work towards their fulfillment. One of the places this public dialogue has consistently been acted out is in the policies and procedures in our society's schools. Since the founding of the nation, schools have been an integral part of efforts to reform society, according to educational historian Joel Spring. In American

Education Spring (1994) points out, "The hope of improving society through public schooling has almost become an article of American faith" (p.13). One of the best means for reforming or improving society has often been interpreted to mean we must build a sense of commonality among disparate peoples. In The American School 1692 -1990 Spring (1990) traces how, beginning in post Revolutionary times, "[t]he use of education as a means of creating a unified population became a major theme in the history of American education" (p.34). At first this meant developing an American culture, and inculcating the children into it. Beginning in the mid-19th century, it meant developing a systematized way of teaching a common set of cultural values to the children of an increasingly urban, industrialized and culturally diverse nation. The public school systems of today developed out of this common school movement. For many years educators officially considered Americanizing immigrants and Native Americans to be the best way of reforming society's political, economic and social ills.

The Civil Rights movement beginning in the mid-20th century pointed out how black Americans had been excluded from the opportunities they should have been afforded in the name of equality. Considering the history of expecting schools to reform society, it is not surprising that the movement began by addressing unequal opportunities in education. The bitter cultural "dialogue" that took place then revealed to Americans of all races some of the limits and possibilities within

conceptions of "our" common culture. For many people the concept of equal opportunity expanded from black children physically attending schools with white children to include things that would enhance success of more children in schools. As Spring (1994) says:

> Some members of the civil rights movements argue that equal education opportunity cannot be achieved for African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans unless the schools incorporate the culture of these groups into their curriculum...There is also the argument that educational achievement can be increased if children are exposed to a curriculum that reflects their particular culture. (p.148)

There are two things to be noted here. They are still both grist for contemporary cultural discourse. First of all, the civil rights movement may be seen as part of a historical struggle in the United States to expand who will be included by those in the mainstream into the "we" entitled to considerations of equality and pursuit of those vaunted unalienable rights. Secondly, these rights are explicitly sought out for *groups within* the larger entity of "our" American society. For Spring (1994), American history is the story of "the steady struggle for increased civil participation in society...Since the founding of the republic, groups have struggled to remove barriers that deny equal access to economic opportunities, institutions, and political power" (p.110). Needless to say, schools are one of the sites of this struggle.

In the introduction to Empowerment through Multicultural Education, Christine Sleeter (1991) traces this contemporary educational movement back to its roots in the Civil Rights movement.

> Multicultural education originated within a context of social activism and has always drawn its main energy and inspiration from struggles against oppression. It developed in the ferment of the 1960s and early 1970s, receiving its major impetus from struggles against racial oppression. (p.9)

Sleeter continues, "multicultural educators must develop the vision and power of our future citizens to forge a more just society" (p.23). Other educators have also made this connection between education and justice. For example, Sonia Nieto considers education for social justice to be an integral part of multicultural education (cited in Spring, 1994, p.164). In addition, in his (1991) justification for the inclusion of multicultural content in social studies curriculum, Banks refers to America's "national commitment to a democratic society" (p.459) that Myrdal noted in 1944.

The movement towards multicultural education has been given a new urgency by several trends being played out in the United States today. As I have noted, our population is becoming increasingly diverse ethnically and racially. According to a recent article in *Review of Research in Education*, "In a mere 40 years, White, non-Hispanic students will be a minority in every category of public education as we know it today" (Garcia, 1993,

p.51). Education today is for an America that our ancestors could not have imagined. The battle over multiculturalism is partially over differing interpretations of how to best make America and Americans fulfill promises made of equality, liberty and justice for all, and to expand who is included in that "all." Indeed, as historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. says, "The debate about the curriculum is a debate about what it means to be American" (p.17).

One of the reasons schools are sites for these conflicts is because historically educators have been responsible for helping Americanize immigrant children, helping prepare all children for the workplace and to a lesser degree, helping prepare America's children to thoughtfully and actively participate in a democracy. Given these current trends, these tasks have become both more difficult and more crucial. Unfortunately, educators who have turned to multicultural education as a tool with which to approach this task find themselves in a "nascent" field (Banks, 1993, p.8) that already appears to have developed "many widely differing conceptions" (Suzuki 1984, cited in Sleeter 1991, p.9) concerning its basic tenets, goals and practices. Seeking legitimization of the field, noted theorists such as Christine Sleeter and James Banks consistently refer to the transformative nature of multicultural education and its ability to empower people to improve society. Banks (1993) points to the "transformative tradition" that multicultural education is

consistent with, one that "promotes justice, equality, and human dignity" (p.39).

Joel Spring (1994) contrasts multicultural education with ethnocentric education that is designed to teach students from the perspective of a particular culture. In this group he includes both traditional (Eurocentric) public school education in the United States, and Afrocentric and Hispanic schools. Such schools preserve the traditions and build the self esteem of the particular, targeted groups of students. Spring does not include education formulated around particular religious orientations in this group, but I think they might fit here.

Spring also contrasts multicultural education with bicultural education which is designed to help children of "dominated" cultures. One example he gives is how Native American children might learn to function in the dominant culture "without having to sacrifice traditional Indian culture" (p.162). They learn both, and ideally do not feel forced to irrevocably choose between the ways of "their people" and the ways that will help them reap the benefits of being able to function in the dominant society. They will be able to go back and forth, when appropriate. Ideally there is no sense of loss then. It would seem that this orientation requires a fairly homogenous student body and a society outside the school that accepts anyone who chooses to join it.

There are those who would consider anything but traditional Eurocentric education as a form of multicultural education, but

Spring positions this as distinctly different from bicultural and both Eurocentric and Afrocentric education. He sees four goals to multicultural education:

> The first goal is to build tolerance of other cultures. The second goal is to eliminate racism. The third goal is to teach the content of different cultures. Finally, the fourth goal is to teach students to view the world from differing cultural frames of reference (p.164).

It is necessary to infuse all of the curriculum in a school with multiculturalism for this to happen. Multicultural education proponent Sonia Nieto believes that students ought to learn all the traditional subjects from multiple perspectives.

> Besides pervading the curriculum, Nieto argues that multicultural education must be considered part of the basics of education. Not only must people learn reading, writing, arithmetic, and basic computer functions to survive in modern society, Nieto argues, but they must also become tolerant of other cultures in a world with global corporations and an internationalized labor force. (cited in Spring, 1994, p.164)

Multicultural education is not only seen by its advocates as a way to better prepare America's children to live in the world as it is now, however. Toleration is seen as an admirable goal to work towards because it is conceived of as including commitment to social justice. Multicultural education will improve society in the future by encouraging both appreciation for diversity and the development a spirit of "activism" in the pursuit of equal opportunities for groups of people who have historically been denied this.

> Nieto includes education for social justice as part of multicultural education...The goal of building cultural tolerance also includes the goal of cultural justice. This means eliminating all social and economic barriers that keep a particular racial or ethnic group from having equal opportunity. In other words, multicultural education should create a spirit of tolerance and activism in students. An understanding of other cultures and of differing cultural frames of reference will, it is assumed, spark students actively work for social justice. (in Spring, 1994, p.164)

In opposition, educators such as Schlesinger feel that multicultural education is potentially divisive and repressive. They believe it is a mistake to move from uniting (or at least attempting to unite) all students around our historically developed and shared democratic, Western European based American culture. Schlesinger articulates this position well.

> The genius of America lies in its capacity to forge a single nation from peoples of remarkably diverse racial, religious, and ethnic origins. It has done so because democratic principles provide both the philosophical bond of union and practical experience in civic participation. The American Creed envisages a nation composed of individuals making their own choices and accountable to themselves, not a nation based on inviolable ethnic communities. The Constitution turns on individual rights, not on group rights. (p.134)

As we struggle and reflect on the promises of multicultural education, we must be aware of its larger political and social significance.

Along these lines, David Rieff (1993) has issued a timely reminder that the contemporary dialogue about multiculturalism as a "theoretical debate" is grounded in what is happening in our society in the same way "the philosophy of the Enlightenment

was [inseparable] from the rapidly secularizing and industrializing world that gave birth to it" (p.62). He finds this to be true even though he does not hear the debate being framed this way. He is concerned that the debate over multiculturalism assumes that "words define reality" (p.63) without examining the *material* reality of our society. For Rieff, the debate is "enormously important" (p.63). It is "the central intellectual argument of our moment" (p.63) and thus deserving of our serious consideration. Such consideration *must* include looking at the cultural context of the argument. Without this, we cannot evaluate the claims to democracy and justice being made by both sides. He is sympathetic to those who seek inclusion in our cultural discourse, but warns that results from the debate itself as it is presently constituted will not "transform the world for the better", "bring redemption" to our society or "justice to the world" (p.72).

Rieff is concerned about this because when he views our society he sees a "multicultural, global, increasingly non-white and non-European society...becoming less democratic, less just, and more impoverished" (p.72). He states that we should bring the "silent partner" of multiculturalism, "the broad and radical change now taking place within world capitalism," (p.62) into the discourse if we wish it to be truly transformative. He asks:

> How can [proponents] insist on the emancipatory power of multiculturalism when during the 1980s - the very decade

> in which multiculturalism became the dominant intellectual current in elite sectors of academia - the conditions of the poor, of working class women, and of America's non-white citizens deteriorated dramatically? If multiculturalism is what its proponents claim it is, why has its moment seen the richest 1 percent of Americans grow richer and the deunionization of the American working place? There is something wrong with this picture. (p.63)

Rieff finds the current discourse on multiculturalism to be one that enhances, not challenges the increasingly globalized capitalist system responsible for these conditions. When Rieff analyzes American culture, he finds that we are a people who are "comfortable, even happy" (p.63) with the fact that "ours is a culture of consumerism and spectacle, of things and *not* ideas" (p.63). He finds that we have added "culture" to those things we have commodfied and marketed under the capitalist system. He finds multiculturalism as it is presently understood by people on both sides of the debate to be a way of increasing inclusion into the capitalist game, thus strengthening capitalism and its inherently unequal and unjust class system. This, despite claims by proponents of multiculturalism to the contrary. For Rieff, "multiculturalism of justice" (p.70) - one that accepted a "radical revision of class relations" (p.71) is not going to come from the growing "multiculturalism of the market" (p.70) he sees now in both in colleges and other businesses.

<u>What is to be done?</u>

Envisioning alternatives to "what is", deciding what actions would be helpful to bringing them about, even understanding both

the sometimes opposing pulls of various "we's" I feel a part of and the needs of others are the things with which I now struggle. This dissertation is part of that struggle. Concerns and questions that I plan to specifically address in this dissertation center around seeking further clarity in important issues within the public discourses concerning the cultural/racial/ethnic diversity which characterizes contemporary American society. What are the social (including political and economic) ramifications of particular positions? How are these positions connected to questions of identity? Are there positions which clearly support my concerns with social justice? Are there recommendations I might make? How might these recommendations be connected to my being an educator?

In my search for deeper understanding of cultural identity, I am continually drawn to the concept of dialogue. Briefly, I find that it speaks directly to modern identity dilemmas identified by Cornel West and others. Dialogue is built on relationship and the on-going co-creation of meaning between the speaker and listener. Each participant is also both listener and speaker in a dialogue. In fact, the "both/and" aspect is important to the concept of dialogue. This makes sense to me as I consider how I might speak from my multiple positions, and engage in dialogues with other people who are also speaking from multiple positions. Speaking from multiple positions does not negate the fact that I am always female *and* Jewish *and* an

American, speaking with others who embody their own set of "both/and's". We are each necessary components for a dialogue, and we must each be both speaker and listener. It is in such dialogues that we come to understand who we are. They are conversations of words and actions. There are many such conversations going on simultaneously in any society.

I agree with Mikhail Bakhtin and other social theorists of dialogue who point out that it is our responsibility as human beings to constantly respond as best we can (as in response-ability) to the dialogues taking place around us; to take part in them and to respect others who are doing the same. It speaks to the need to develop one's own intrinsic "addressivity" (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 66) or capacity to respond to the dialogues taking place (intrinsic, because at least some basic level of addressivity to one's environment is a characteristic of all living organisms.) People should be able to develop this capacity, to make their responses thoughtful rather than merely reflexive ones.

I undertake this research, believing that educators in particular should address issues of their own personal identity in order to have a better understanding of how this informs both their theorizing and their practice. As I have been reading, seeking to analyze the contexts of the experiences that affect my own sense of identity, I have found little formal connection between work in Jewish studies and in multicultural education, although they are both concerned with cultural identity. On one

hand are the discussions of cultural identity, including discourse concerning "multicultural education". On the other hand are the extensive, (but mostly non-educational) discussions of "Jewish identity". As I seek to become more critically conscious of my own sense of identity, my own position, I seek to clarify my relationships to important issues within each, and any connections between these two areas. What are the important issues within multicultural education? Within questions of Jewish identity? What are some liberatory possibilities within Judaism/Jewish identity? How are these issues related to each other and to me? I seek an understanding of forces resisting as well as supporting integration of these dialectics, as well as a greater understanding of how they inform my praxis. I also ask: How might they? Recommendations might flow from some clarity concerning these issues, for myself and perhaps even for other educators, but this step is by no means a certainty at this point.

In the next chapter, after laying out some of the historical and contemporary issues of identity for Jews, I will reflect upon my own experiences and connections to these issues. In the third chapter I will continue my analysis of cultural/Jewish, identity by specifically exploring the writings of Jewish educators, theologians and feminists. The final chapter will be a synthesis of this investigation as I seek to articulate both positions and possibilities for myself and other educators.

CHAPTER II

JEWISH IDENTITY IN AMERICA

Background

The history of Jews in America offers some help in understanding the issues of cultural identity with which contemporary Jews struggle. I choose to study "[t]he tale of the Jews in America" not because it is the "epitome of the ethnic success story" (Bershtel & Graubard, p.11) but rather to understand the intricacy of this tale and how it continues to play out in an increasingly multicultural America. I also seek a deeper understand of how this contemporary process might reflect my concerns for social justice and cultural identity. This is an intellectual undertaking, a personal journey and a spiritual search. I recognize the wisdom of Cornel West's injunction that questions about identity are at their base, existential, religious questions. I turn to study Jewish experiences in America, in part to better comprehend my own "deep visceral need to belong" and my "desire for recognition, association and protection" (West, 1992b, p. 20).

I turn now to Americans like me who include "Jewish" as part of their identity. In complex ways these Americans both do and do not constitute a group. Although demographically they might be said to make up a small group, together consisting of

less than three percent of the population of the United States, as with any group, "Jews" are quite diverse. To speak for example of Jews and "their" (or "our") relationship with Israel is to include a spectrum of relationships spanning Noam Chomsky and Henry Kissinger. Any statement about feelings of "Jewish identity" (defined by sociologist Harold Himmelfarb (1982) as "one's sense of self with regard to being Jewish" (p. 57)) should recognize that "Jewish" encompasses a variety of Jews, including both the cultic, fundamentalist Hasidim and the "unaffiliated" (Bershtel & Graubard, pp. 11-12) for whom being Jewish does not necessarily entail belonging to any organized Jewish community, or practicing Judaism as a religion. Indeed, for the unaffiliated, Jewish identity may not be tied to any religious faith. In addition, the ethnic and historic connections of the unaffiliated to other Jews are counteracted by "a secular universalist perspective, tolerance in culture and politics, a defense of freedom of choice in life-style and identity" (p.37). Unaffiliated Jews do not deny that they are Jewish, but say that being Jewish is but a small part of their cultural identity.

For those whose Jewish identity is tied to religious affiliation, the *Reform* branch is the largest one of the three major branches within contemporary Judaism. Reform Judaism is less concerned with traditional religious ritual, beliefs and practices than with contemporary ethical behavior. Reform

Judaism was brought to the United States and developed by German Jews in the nineteenth century. Now "embracing many Jews of Eastern European descent as well" (Gordon, 1964, p.193) it has also been cited as traditionally being "the segment of American Jewry most willing to make the greatest modifications in Jewish law and practice to conform to the temper of American life" (Shapiro, 1992, p.168). A much smaller number of American Jews are *Orthodox* Jews today, consciously following the old religious traditions, beliefs and rituals as closely as they can in the modern world. The Hasidim are a small part of this branch. The third branch is *Conservative* Judaism. This branch developed in the United States during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. It was developed primarily by middle class Jewish Americans seeking a way of reconciling the ideals of middle class America and a modern Jewish identity that retained closer ties to the tradition than did Reform Judaism.

Yet another area of diversity concerns geographic and ethnic origins and heritages; American Jews most often trace their roots along either Sephardic or Ashkenazic lines. Sephardic is a term which refers to either Southern Mediterranean European or Northern African heritages while Askenazic Jews have Northern European roots. Different customs, traditions and connections developed in these varied locations. For example, the Reform movement had no counterpart in the Sephardic world.

The concept "Jewish", therefore, links people whose connections may depend on the situation, the context. In one instance sharing an ethnic heritage might forge the closest connections, whereas in another, the connection may be religious tradition. For example, there are places in the United States where Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities live beside each other without much interaction between them. In other instances, it is the varying interpretations of how "being Jewish" ought to affect behavior that most strongly affect bonds of affiliation. Jews for whom observance of the numerous commandments codified in Halakhah (Rabbinical Law) forms the core of their Jewish identity will often construct relatively loose ties with unaffiliated Jews. Jews for whom their "Jewish identity" is primarily a way of demonstrating universal ethical precepts may likewise find it difficult to forge strong ties with more particularistic Jews. Jews who are participants in contemporary spiritual renewal movements express their Jewish identity differently than those whose connections to being Jewish primarily involve cultural or historical connections. In addition, Jews for whom gender equality is important often find themselves in conflict with those who adhere strongly to the patriarchal laws and traditions that are integral to the Jewish heritage. But this is not to say that alliances are not forged nor connections made among Jews whose interpretations and heritages are different. Historically, coalitions have formed across these lines to oppose anti-Semitism, to support the state

of Israel when it is in danger, or to help new Jewish immigrants adjust to life in the United States.

Likewise, anthropologist Jack Kugelmass (1988) declares himself fascinated by the "diversity of American Jewry", by the permutations possible when people agree to share an identity and yet are organized only informally" (p.2). Because the bonds that tie them together today are "by custom rather than by law" he finds no "coherent identity" for American Jews. Identities connected to things such as race, gender, social class, political persuasion and nationality may cut across people's Jewish affiliations and either weaken or support them. For example, the bonds and conflicts between American and Israeli Jews are sometimes affected by the fact that the people are American and Israeli as much as they are by any sense of a shared Jewish identity.

One example of context in my own life was when I lived in the Caribbean. There I found, among those in my life who "agree to share a [Jewish] identity," the young black woman who was my older son's first date. They were classmates in the Hebrew class of our synagogue in St. Thomas, the United States Virgin Islands. Our inter-racial congregation there surprised many of the Ashkenazic Jewish tourists who visited us. Their Jewish identity did not easily cross racial lines.

Definitions and explanations of Jewish identity are complex and important. In Modernity and Ambivalence, Zygmunt Bauman says, "to define the Jew is (as tempting and as

impossible as) to define the writer, the poet, the spider-like creature suspended in the textual net which he [sic] goes on weaving: is to define the human" (p.191). Like Bauman, I note this, and thoughtfully continue to use the terms "Jew" and "Jewish." Part of the complexity of the issue is because "Jewish" is a uniquely "messy" category, one with an inherent "doubling of meaning" as Bershtel and Graubard explain in Saving Remnants, their 1992 study investigating feelings of identity among American Jews. They write:

> "Jewish" as a sociological category is uniquely messy. Typically, ethnic and religious classifications are separate; one can be "Irish" as an ethnic-national identification, while being Catholic-most commonly- or Protestant or even Jewish, for that matter, as regards religious affiliation. But "Jewish" cannot be so neatly separated. Clearly Judaism is a religion, and people identified as Jewish are popularly assumed to be adherents of this religion. But being Jewish is also an ethnic category. Jews are the only religious group that also is included in encyclopedias of ethnic peoples. (p.99)

Jews in America

People's sense of cultural identity both shapes and is shaped by their understanding of "their" history. For an examination of how this has operated for American Jews, I primarily turn to Milton Gordon's, Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins, with additional commentary from Sara Bershtel and Allen Graubard's, Saving Remnants: Feeling Jewish in America, Abraham Shulman's, The New Country: Jewish Immigrants in America, Leonard Fein's,

Where Are We?: The Inner Life of America's Jews, and Jacob Neusner's "Judaism in Contemporary America."

One can stand on an ocean beach and watch a wave form out at sea and surge towards the shore, inexorably pushed and pulled by forces beyond its control. Once it arrives it dissolves into the surrounding water, both intermingling with and opposing the succeeding waves. The history of Jews in America is often referred to using the metaphor of *waves*. This seems somewhat apt in light of the fact that the majority of Jews immigrating to America have been consistently "Americanized" (Bershtel & Graubard, p. 12) with alacrity. The story of Jews in America may be seen fundamentally as one of immigration and integration. Gordon begins his "brief historical perspective" by pointing out "there have been three waves of Jewish immigration to the United States" (p.183) ending in the 1920's.

> The first, during colonial times, consisted of, first, Sephardim (that is Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin) who came directly from the Netherlands, England, or the European colonies of Central and South America, and, later in the period, Askenazim (that is, Jews of German origin), who arrived from Central Europe. This was numerically a very small migration (there were probably no more than 2500 Jews in the United States in 1790). (Gordon, p.1)

Gordon thus notes both the diversity within this migration, and its early date. Others, too have noted the small, "very early Jewish presence" in America (Kugelmass, p.3). Gordon continues:

> Although the [Sephardim and Askenazim] mixed, they were culturally dominated by the Sephardim, who had undergone more acculturation to the Western World and the forces of

> the Enlightenment. These colonial Jews were largely a middle-class group of merchants, and the more wealthy and influential among them were apparently accepted into the communal life of the Gentile upper class of the day. Considerable intermarriage appears to have taken place, which led eventually to the absorption of the intermarried Jew, or at least his [sic] descendants, into the Gentile subsociety. (p.183)

Shulman (1976) puts the Jews who came "seeking refuge" from Bavaria and Posen after the Napoleonic Wars as the beginning of the second wave (p.6). Gordon is more general concerning the beginnings of this wave as he describes Jews' involvement in the movement westward and the urbanization that came to characterize the United States. He writes:

> The second wave of Jewish immigration occurred in the middle portion of the nineteenth century and consisted, for the most part, of Jews from various German states. Many of these immigrants arrived relatively impoverished and began their life in the United States as peddlers, fanning out to the communities of the hinterland, the Midwest, the West, and the South to sell their wares. Eventually, the peddler settled down and became a storekeeper and, in some cases, the proprietor of what became the large department store in the large city. Thus the German Jews prospered... (p.184)

Until they did so, and lost their heavy German accents, they were looked upon with "condescension" (Shulman, p.7) and apprehension by those earlier immigrants, the Sephardic Jews. The apprehension was that their foreigness might "make all Jews 'stand out' in the general pattern of American life" and thereby cause an outbreak of anti-Semitism (Shulman, p.36).

> [I]n the late 1840's and 1850's [German Jewish immigrant] ranks were swelled by German Jewish professionals and intellectuals who, along with the more numerous non-Jewish

> Germans were fleeing a political climate inhospitable to democracy. The German Jews of this mid-nineteenth century period who came to this country had had greater exposure to the freedoms and doctrines of the Enlightenment, which began to spread throughout Europe after the French Revolution, than their fellow Ashkenazim who resided in the territories of Poland and Russia to the East. These German Jews brought with them Reform Judaism, which represented a drastic refashioning of the doctrines and ritual of traditional Judaism in line with Western values. The most prosperous of the German Jews in the larger cities eventually, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, became a Jewish upper class, resting on a solid middle-class base. (Gordon, p.184)

Several hundred thousand immigrants came in this wave, before it ended with the 1871 unification of Germany. Their enthusiastic bid to join the great American melting pot of immigrants was generally accepted, although access to some residential areas, clubs, schools, businesses and hotels remained restricted. In turn, they came to feel that their positions within American society were threatened by the immigrants of the third wave. A "tide" of Eastern European Jews soon dwarfed their numbers. As Gordon explains:

> [B]eginning in the 1870's and swelling to substantial proportions in the 1880's and 1890's, the tide of Eastern European Jewry, fleeing persecution and economic dislocation in the lands of the Czars and hard times in the empire of the Hapsburgs, came to America seeking refuge and a new life. Before this tide was cut off, temporarily by World War I and eventually by the quota laws of the 1920's, probably two and one third million Jews from Eastern Europe had taken up residence in the United States. (p.184)

It is this third wave, by dint of its numbers and the fact that no major wave followed it, that has most given a flavor to

what is usually spoken about as the Jewish immigration experience. For example, Bershtel and Graubard write about today's population of approximately five and a half to six million American Jews as representing a "notable increase from the estimated two and a half million Jews who emigrated from Europe between 1880 and 1924" (p.11). The "tale of the Jews in America" they tell is that of these third wave immigrants and their descendants, as do Shulman, Kugelmass and Jacob Neusner. In "Judaism in Contemporary America" (1988) Neusner puts the number at three and a half million Eastern European immigrants (p.311). He describes how the participants and descendants of the third wave are creating a new way of defining Judaism and of being Jewish.

While it is true that most American Jews trace their personal roots back to this wave of immigration, myself included, the earlier waves should not be forgotten. One reason for this is that a study of the earlier waves reveals the variety of ways people have developed to be Jewish in America throughout its history. Returning to Bershtel and Graubard's comment that "Clearly, Judaism is a religion and people identified as Jewish are popularly assumed to be adherents of this religion" (p.99), participants in *all three* waves have also helped demonstrate the variety of ways people have developed of "adhering". For example, it was the second wave which brought Reform Judaism to America, which the third wave ended up

adopting and adapting. Indeed, there was continued interaction among the participants and descendants of each of the waves, as there continues to be today between the descendants of all three and the Jews who have immigrated more recently from Russia and from Israel. The descendants of earlier waves have generally accepted those in the more recent wave only as these "strangers" exchanged their foreign ways and became more Americanized and "modern".

The United States was undergoing a major period of urbanization when the third Jewish immigrant wave arrived, and the immigrants continued to become part of this development. Unlike the earlier German immigrants who had settled in the smaller towns and cities, however, most of the third wave of Jewish immigrants stayed on the East Coast, in the major cities, especially New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. As Gordon points out:

> Although the German-Jewish community took on social work and "Americanizing" functions in relation to the hordes of Jews from Eastern Europe from the very beginning, the social chasm between the two groups, based on both cultural and class factors, persisted for some years. In the end it was to be overcome as the more recent immigrants, and particularly their children, rose in the economic and social scale during the twentieth century and were acculturated and socialized into American patterns of behavior. (p.185)

Gordon credits the "phenomenal rise in occupational status" for the participants and descendants of the third wave of immigrants to a meshing of their internalized middle class

values, such as "thrift, sobriety, ambition, desire for education, ability to postpone immediate gratification for the sake of long-range goals and aversion to violence" and their ability to meet industrial "demands of an expanding American economy" (p.186). Others have analyzed these and additional factors which helped the third wave immigrants when they came to America. There are several factors which are important to this inquiry into cultural identity.

The first concerns the demographics of the group. It has been noted that the immigration in many ways was a "migration" (Kessner, 1983, 174). Driven by "fear, oppression, and a discriminatory public policy" (p.174), families, groups- sometimes whole communities sought a secure, permanent new life in America. One fourth of their numbers were children. They came, driven by both the oppression they faced as Jews in Eastern Europe and the lure of America - the land that promised acceptance and opportunity. Given the harsh alternatives, an invitation to join such a nation was extremely attractive.

It was also important to current issues that the immigrants were both men and women. As Paula Hyman (1983) notes,

> Women constituted a greater proportion of Jewish immigrants than of any other component of what was labeled the New Immigration of 1880 -1924. And the cultural norms of an East European Jewry in transition enabled women to participate, although not on an equal basis with men, in the public life of the immigrant community. (p.157)

The public, secular sphere was open to these women, and they took advantage of this opportunity. They "flocked to free courses of instruction", developed "a high degree of literacy in English" and took active roles in political and civic affairs (p.160). Thus began a tradition that gave rise to today's robust feminist discourse within both American and Jewish scholarship.

Third wave immigrants also encouraged their children to take advantage of education. Education was seen as the key to unlocking the door to becoming an American. "The immigrant generation sought security for their children and as they understood it this required American education....While other [immigrant] groups held their offspring firmly to the old ways...they passed their children on to America." (Kessner, p.177). This belief in the power of education has been noted by many historians and social scientists. It is part of the leitmotif of the stories told by and about the third wave of Jewish immigrants and their descendants.

Another factor which has helped shape the experiences Jews have had in America is that of race. The concept of race has always been socially constructed. These constructions have always had tremendous impacts on people's lives; which rights they're accorded and which privileges they're afforded. In their study of the sociohistorical development of racial concepts in the United States, Michael Omi and Harold Winant (1992) trace the re-drawing of the color line after the Civil

War in the nineteenth century. The non Anglo Saxon working class Irish, Italian and Jewish immigrants were added to the "white" category. The new color line was drawn "*around* rather than *within* Europe" (p.32). This allowed the immigrants to assimilate, even as it divided the working class along racial lines. As Cornel West (1992b) points out, immigrants who had been "subordinated and degraded within their old-world conditions" and "didn't know they [were] white until they got here" (p.34), found that being white provided them with a beneficial "identity-from-above" and gave them advantages in bids for the resources of America. I feel that this is an unacknowledged aspect of many accounts of the success of Jews in America.

This is not to say that it was easy for the immigrants to succeed economically or for them (and their descendants) to assimilate or "melt" into the great American Melting Pot. Both might be possible due to the above factors, but they were by no means assured. Nor does it speak to the possibilities of "melting" while maintaining a meaningful Jewish identity. What the immigrants and their descendants have had to deal with has not been common in Jewish history; the situation is a modern one.

In the United States, the country founded on the ideals of the Enlightenment, Jews have had to deal with "the condition of freedom" (Neusner, p.311). There are two important aspects of

this freedom. The first concerns the fact that they *were* free to choose to join their nonJewish fellow residents of this modern nation in becoming one of "us", an American (more precisely, a white American.) As Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out, the call to assimilate grows from the very nature of modern nations; they must construct a "collective identity" (p. 69). This was true for modern European nations as well as for the United States. As Bershtel and Graubard point out:

> The Enlightenment concepts of a secular national state, religious toleration, and universal citizenship offered emancipation to Jews - that is, they could, as individuals, finally become full members of the nation in which they had been living a separate community existence. (p.13)

The United States was unusual in that the offer here was a real one. This is in contrast to the countries of origin for the Jewish immigrants. The German offer to Jews concerning assimilation was not genuine. In Russia and the other Eastern European nations, the offer was briefly made, then withdrawn (c.f. Bershtel & Graubard, p.252). As Bauman has pointed out, however, the offer has its drawbacks. It conflicts with other group identities, such as religious or ethnic ones. It also involves becoming more similar to those within the existing "body" of the nation; those who seek entrance within but remain too different are forever untrustworthy "strangers". Given the benefits of joining, including protection and the opportunity to prosper, it is little wonder that most of the immigrants

accepted the offer to become part of the *unam* "like us/one of us." This acceptance has also entailed the beginning of a struggle to figure out what it meant in relation to their Jewish identity; how their religious and ethnic identities intersected with the proffered national identity. It is an endeavor with which their descendants continue to struggle

The second aspect of "the condition of freedom" is that modern Jews have had to make decisions about the nature, the shape, the texture of their Jewish identities. In "Judaism in contemporary America," Jacob Neusner explains that as time has gone on, there has been less and less "external compulsion" to be Jewish, and to define being Jewish in any particular way for the descendants of the third wave. The immigrants themselves may have spoken Yiddish, "pursued a limited range of occupations and lived mainly in crowded Jewish neighborhoods in a few large cities" (p.311), but their children, as expected, gave up many of the practices and beliefs their parents had brought from Europe, and integrated into American society. The immigrants may have been Jewish by "cultural distinctiveness"; but their children's Jewish identity came to be much more of a "Jewishness by association" (p.313). For them, being Jewish did not "demand articulation, let alone specific and concrete expression" (p.313). However, as they assimilated into American life their friends were usually Jewish, and nonsectarian activities and goals were most often pursued with other Jews. Bershtel and

Graubard describe this as becoming "acculturated" to American society without really becoming "assimilated" - if assimilated is taken to mean the "dissolution of the community, the 'melting' of individuals into the population where their ethnic identity effectively dissolves" (p.33).

In contrast, in describing my generation, the grandchildren of the third wave immigrants, Neusner says they are "virtually" assimilated (p.318). Polls report that although full assimilation into American society has taken place, the descendants of the third wave also consistently state that "being Jewish" is important to them; "central to their very being"(p.319). Others have noted this, too. Bershtel and Graubard refer to the "positive assertions [of Jewish identity] and staunch identifications" even among those who are otherwise "unaffiliated" (p.29).

Like most of the Jewish writers who write about Jewish American experiences, Neusner feels that Judaism has much to offer, and is thus encouraged by a "renaissance of articulated and self-conscious Jewishness, along with a renewed search for Judaism" (p.314) that he has observed among these thoroughly assimilated grandchildren of the immigrants. He credits the rise of the State of Israel, especially after the 1967 war there, and the general "re-ethnicization of American life" (p.314) in the 1960s. He defines the latter as "the resurgence of ethnic identification among the grandchildren of the immigrant generations and among blacks and other excluded groups

that long ago had become American by force" (p.314). It would seem that the rise of multiculturalism nurtured, among others, a stronger Jewish identity.

Neusner is somewhat encouraged, because despite the lack of faith in the traditional Jewish vision of "history and destiny" (p.318), lack of knowledge about traditional Jewish theology, and the general lack of commitment to the Jewish mitzvot such as maintaining dietary laws (*mitzvot* are voluntarily accepted commandments which are also blessings), he sees people still seeking to communally construct modern, meaningful Jewish identities. Neusner strives to be encouraged by this effort, given that there are so many choices and so few certainties in the modern world when it comes to questions of identity.

This last point concerning the centrality of choice is pivotal to Bershtel and Graubard's analysis of modern American "Jewish identity". They refer to what now exists as one which is "a historically unprecedented situation, where nostalgia for a lost world coexists easily with integration into the larger culture, and where feeling ethnic requires no communal affiliations" (p.44). Assimilation no longer requires the abandonment of particular ethnic or religious identification. They posit what we now have as a "post-assimilationist state", defined as one in which:

> [T]he most powerful forces shaping consciousness and identity are no longer commitments to or rebellions against religious or ethnic groups, as in the old assimilation paradigm, but free choice, psychic as well as

> physical mobility, and individualism - which may even include some degree of ethnic and religious identification. (p.44)

"Some degree" which does not compromise the "common identity" or smack of "strangerhood", I might add. Descendants of the third wave continue to make statements that their "Jewish identity" is important to them. However, Bershtel, Graubard and others note "historic trends of attrition and disaffiliation" (Bershtel & Graubard, p.286) in modern times, the diminution of people's "Jewish identity". Himmelfarb notes that this matter has been reflected in the plethora of research regarding American Jewish identity. He writes, "[T]he concern of early studies with identity was integration, the concern of the later studies with identification has been a concern for survival [of Jewish distinctiveness and of traditional Judaism.]" (p.57). About the survival of a robust "Jewish identity", Arthur Hertzberg (1989) notes, "It is possible in this new age of America to evaporate out of being Jewish without making a decision to be anything else. In fact the drift of life in contemporary life is toward free association" (p.386). Historian Edward Shapiro writes of an "attenuated Jewish identity" (p.170) in contemporary times (p.169) and cites novelist Herman Wouk's 1950s plaintive admonition, "The threat of Jewish oblivion in America is the threat of pleasantly vanishing down a broad highway at the wheel of a high-powered station wagon, with the golf clubs piled in the back" (Cited in Shapiro, p.169). Nathan Glazer (1990) is concerned that in a

hundred years, "American Jews, in general, affected by intermarriage and a secular society not easily influenced by religious themes, will preserve only a hazy identity as Jews" (p.40).

Bershtel and Graubard explain much of this phenomenon through their understanding of the ideas developed in The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness (Berger, Berger, & H.Kellner, 1973). There Berger et al. say, "Modern identity is peculiarly open" (p.77) to choices made by individuals. Choice and change are expected. They are the birthrights of modern identity. Bershtel and Graubard make a strong case for stating that most modern Jews do not see Jewish identity as dictated by destiny. It is not the historic image of "the chosen people" as much as it is now that of a "choosing people" (p.300), or a people "by choice" (p.288). I see evidence of this in my own family where a brief look will reveal Orthodox, Chasidic, mainstream Reform and unaffiliated American Jews today. Bershtel and Graubard find all this choosing to be a brittle basis for identity, especially since it is always subject to change as part of an ongoing search for "authenticity" (p.299). Such a search is part of a ubiquitous contemporary "quest for personal fulfillment" (p.8). Furthermore, they point out, "There can be no return from this disposition to choose" (p.300).

Not everyone laments this development. Reflective of the diversity within the plethora of opinions of those who write

about Jewish identity in America, Leonard Fein (1988) enthusiastically takes a more positive view of choice. He finds great opportunity contained within today's forced condition of "making choices among the multiple answers the [Jewish] traditions propose, the people present" (p.xviii); choices for developing a meaningful modern Jewish identity. He relishes the opportunity to do so. He writes:

> Whichever the yesterday we try to copy, we will fail, for yesterday was not an abstraction. It was a specific point in space and time and a specific community living and responding there and then. Here and now, it is our own story we must write, and live. That is the starting place for authenticity. (p.293)

He points out that we have a responsibility to live as Jews "ought" in whatever times and places we find ourselves. He is well aware of unique opportunities and dilemmas modern life in the United States has presented to Jews, and the difficulties they have created in respect to creating such lives. Addressing American Jews as an assimilated and economically successful group, he asks, "Why, now that Judaism is no longer a condition but an optional commitment, why be Jewish?" (p.xviii). He offers his own answers. They are answers which reflect a life centered around the moral vision articulated within Judaism, especially prophetic Judaism which emphasizes our universal human responsibility for each other. Within this "meaning and message" (p.xxi) of Judaism, the world will be healed; mended through the actions of people acting on this responsibility. If

Jews have been chosen for anything, it is for accepting this duty of seeking social justice. Fein interprets this to mean social justice for all, Jews and nonJews both. He sees this as a traditional Jewish "calling", capable of being the core of a contemporary, meaningful Jewish identity. He advocates moving away from the recent choices many American Jews have made, moving beyond

> [P]ediatric Judaism ("It's good for the children") and cardiac Judaism ("It's enough that I feel Jewish") and nostalgic and gastronomic and all the other empty expressions of residual Judaism that remain so very popular as substitutes for a Judaism of purpose, of commitment. (p.209)

In contrast to Neusner, Fein's views reflect (liberal) Reform views of Jewish tradition and are thus reflective of the diversity of interpretations among those who advocate choosing a stronger "Jewish identity". Fein celebrates America's pluralism, feeling that everyone will be better off in a society which fosters respect for groups of people who may belong to different religions and racial/ethnic groups. "In this country, both the welfare of the Jews and the condition of justice depend on the health of liberal, democratic pluralism" (p.233).

Fein writes that this present-day endeavor is related to the larger theme that living meaningful lives as American Jews, is to be always balancing "at the unstable place where the particular and the universal intersect" (p.8). The process is not to be "resolved"; it is ongoing

> [W]ith respect to the "choice" between particularism and universalism. We must speak, then, of a "both-and" understanding, of an arch: the tension between the two is not an either-or problem in search of resolution; it is an existential condition, a condition to be lived with, possibly even enjoyed, as we move back and forth between the two. *And in America, it can be enjoyed.* (P.193)

I know well the tensions to which Fein refers; they have reverberated throughout my life. I include in the next section some of those experiences here in order to make explicit my own locations within these larger theories and analyses. As I seek to better understand my own sense of identity, I also strive to imbue it with a sense of agency and authority that I can find hope and meaning in my life and my work as a Jewish woman and an educator, at least in part, by helping bring about a more just and humane society. Fein's questions (and answers) continue to challenge me.

In addition, I quote from Bertolt Brecht, "Wo ich gelernt habe" (Where I have learned), in Gesammelte Werke. There Brecht shares his reasons for writing about his own process of learning. I share his conviction in the benefits of such writing.

> In the following I shall note where I myself have learned, at least as far as I remember. And I shall write it down, not only so that others might gain from it, but also so that I myself can get an overview. One learns yet once again when one finds out what one has learned. (Cited in R. Linden, 1993, p.13)

Autobiogrphical Research

Although I think it is important to understand heritage, before I examine my own it is important to explain that this is *not* because I believe that it is somehow also destiny. To declare that heritage dictates destiny is to tragically deny human agency and our ability to make choices about our future actions. It also ignores the dialectics among individuals that shape them all, and the larger dialectics that constantly shape relations between people and their society - both dialectics which affect the future. To equate heritage with destiny also comes dangerously close to assuming the existence of only one, correct interpretation of that heritage. Such an assumption runs counter to the way I have presented the heritages of Jews in America, and of the United States itself. In addition, such unitary conceptions of heritage will prove inadequate in the development of a deeper understanding of contemporary cultural and educational problems. However, possibilities for the future *are* informed by interpretations of heritages. We are shaped by our understandings of experiences. It is in this vein that I continue to explore my own heritage.

The divisions I have made between sections on growing up, marriage and family, spiritual/religious journey and career are to help explicate how the issues of identity have played out in my life and brought me to my present personal and professional positions. Dividing my experiences this way also somewhat

obscures the way in which developments in one section affected what happened in the others, the relationships between my identities.

Growing up. As a child, my questions about identity began with my inquiries about my names. My English name, Linda - the one on my New York City birth certificate, is the most common name given to white baby girls in the years surrounding my birth. My mother told me that her choosing this name reflected the popularity of screen actress Linda Darnell. It seemed to me, growing up among other "baby boomer" Lindas, that the name was a symbol of my Americaness. The fact that this was considered my "real" name speaks to my family's assimilation. Linda has always been a shared name and has come to feel like a rather generic name, a national and generational locator.

My Hebrew name also links me, albeit to a different identity. In keeping with the traditional Ashkenazic custom of naming children after beloved, deceased family members, I was named Leah for my mother's grandmother Leah. She is an important part of my links to the past. Never having the opportunity to know her, I have had to depend on older family members' remembrances, and photos. I grew up nurtured on tales of Leah's youthful sparks of rebelliousness, her basic resourcefulness and her great psychological strength. She was born into a bourgeoisie Jewish family in the Russian Pale, and married at a young age to a rabbinical student. Separated from her husband and six older children (who had already emigrated to

America) by the Russian Revolution and WW I, she survived in Russia, sometimes on the run with the four little ones, until she was located. The reunion of the entire family in New York City was an occasion of great joy and celebration. My mother's memories of her were forged in the years when she was growing up in New York City, surrounded by cousins - the offspring of Leah's children. Leah gazes intently, yet serenely out of a 1921 family portrait that hangs both in my mother's house and in my own. It proudly displays Leah and Louis, not long after their reconciliation, with all their children, sons and daughters in law, and grandchildren. The watch and chain she wears around her neck in the picture are now mine. I still wear the chain with its "new" watch, replaced by my grandmother, to important occasions. There is one other link I feel to that portrait. There is an infant girl in the photo. Her son is my age. When my cousin and I were teenagers, I met my future husband in their house; my circle of friends did not extend much past family and friends who were other Ashkenazic descendants of the third wave immigrants.

All four of my grandparents were part of the massive third wave of immigration, arriving and settling in New York City at the beginning of this century. Their tales of both pre-Revolutionary Russia, where they could never have the civil rights of Russians, and turn of the century New York were my introduction to "history". I was an adult before I wondered why their stories were so divorced from the history I learned in

school. Neither do I remember wondering why Jews were present in school Literature but not in History. Such was part of my taken for granted world.

The history of my family's integration into American society matches well with what historians and social scientists have noted about the third wave of Jewish immigration. Two of my four grandparents worked in the garment industry. Although none had much schooling, either in Russia or the US, they all passed on a belief in the benefits of education to their children and grandchildren. Surrounded by other Jews, they slowly acculturated and unambiguously "passed their children on to America" (Kessner, p.177).

Their children, my parents, continued to both acculturate, adopting American values and customs (Bershtel & Graubard, p.33) *and* to be Jewish "by association" (Neusner, p.313), moving up to middle class status with other Jews, in Jewish neighborhoods sometimes referred to as "gilded ghettos". I left this milieu when I left New York City to attend college. The image of America I took with me was basically of a land of opportunity.

My father's mother, Sadie, came to America alone at the age of fourteen. She found a place to live with a woman who had "three rooms, three children and three boarders." Her stories were about working in the garment industry and supporting herself until she was successfully courted by one of those other boarders. She remembered the horrible Triangle Shirtwaist

Factory fire, and remarked that it was just a case of luck that she was working at a different place at the time. The fatalities that resulted from that fire mobilized garment workers to work towards changing the city laws regulating working conditions in clothing factories. As far as I know, she did not get involved with union activities, preferring to marry and leave factory work.

Sadie's goals centered more on getting her citizenship papers and raising a family. Eschewing the opportunity to get her papers through her marriage (as my grandfather had already become a citizen), she went to night school and learned what she needed in order to get the papers on her own. She proudly showed me the certificate many times. In Russia she had not been able to officially attend school because she was Jewish. In America, her opportunities were soon restricted by her responsibilities as a wife and mother.

Sadie encouraged me to get all the schooling I could, and attended all my graduations. I was most touched by her attending my high school graduation. Tickets were required for attendance at the ceremony and I had not been able to get tickets for any of my grandparents. They said they understood, and a family get-together was planned for after the ceremonies. Without fanfare or even announcement, my grandmother Sadie went by herself to Carnegie Hall, where the ceremony took place - and somehow, in her broken English, talked her way in. She went

only for the pleasure of seeing her American granddaughter achieve something denied her.

Sadie also had the "naches" or joy of becoming a great-grandmother. However, I think it remained inexplicable to her that my sons did not understand the Yiddish she spoke to them. Typical of third wave immigrant families, in two generations my family had gone from unschooled working class immigrants who spoke Russian, Yiddish and English (as well as being able to read Hebrew) to college educated middle class grandchildren who could teach *their* children only English.

My father's father, Louis, did become involved with unionizing the garment workers. He helped found the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. I remember spirited discussions around the dining room table in my grandparents' house about workers' rights and other political and social issues. He was a strong advocate for workers and citizens taking active roles in improving the conditions of their lives. He was even for revolution if it would help enhance social justice for the people. Simultaneously, he (correctly) assumed that my grandmother would continue to regularly prepare and serve the food that literally nourished these discussions. Revolutions were for workers, not wives.

I grew up a short car ride from these grandparents, and within walking distance of my other grandparents. It was at my mother's parents' house that I felt most part of an extended

family. I remember seders at Pesach here that took weeks of planning, shopping and cooking. It became apparent to me that commemorating the Exodus from Egypt required lots of food and preparation. It seemed as though dozens of people gathered in their small apartment. Somehow room was made for everyone. My uncles, aunts and cousins gathered yearly here, and told me about the really big seders in the old days - when Louis would bring anyone left in the synagogue home with him, and Leah knowingly planned for an extra five or six participants. My memories are mostly of helping with the food, eating, drinking, getting hugged a lot, and playing with my cousins. Perhaps this is because the actual proceedings of the seders were entirely in Hebrew, which I didn't understand. My mother's mother, Anna, died when I was 12, but I am indebted to her for any rudimentary Yiddish I know. I learned it from eavesdropping on her conversations with my mother. My "education" ended when she died, as my mother seldom spoke Yiddish after that. Through her I also learned that I was part of an extended family. My older son, Adam is named for her.

My mother's father conducted the seders there, and later in my parents' home. He lived the longest of all my grandparents. Grandpa Robbie had the pleasure of attending Adam's Bar Mitzvah. He was in frail health at the time, and my mother was worried about his traveling to where we lived, in the Caribbean. He informed her that *he* was going. If this made her nervous, then

she could stay home! He was a determined man. He lost his grocery store in the Depression, and became a salesman for a cookie company. He worked at this, pounding a beat with his sample case, until he was forced to retire. He encouraged my education, sure that it would lead to an easier way to "make it" in America.

Although both my parents were born in New York City, my mother Evelyn did not learn to speak English until she went to school. Americanized by the schools to value only English, my mother did not pass on her knowledge of Yiddish to me. My parents married after my father returned from fighting in World War II. My father, Samuel, is one of the many veterans who attended college through the GI Bill. He became a white collar worker, an accountant. Throughout his life he has worked towards "setting things right" for groups he has been a part of. He has helped organize fellow college students, fellow apartment dwellers, fellow townspeople and fellow veterans to fight for their rights. He has always had faith that things might be changed; that they might be improved with the right efforts. He and my mother shared an appreciation for the benefits that accompany joining the middle class. My mother always held a salaried job, usually as a secretary. We always had a car and took vacations far from the city. Typical of middle class Jewish American girls of my time, I also went away to summer camp, had orthodontia and took piano lessons. My mother also

arranged for me to become a Girl Scout and recruited my best friends to join me.

Neither of my parents considered it important for either me or my younger sister to have a religious education aside from sending us to a camp for Jewish kids for three weeks each summer. My father has never expressed regret that he only had a cursory religious education himself. The only time he attended religious services with any regularity was when he was in the army. Stationed in the South, he decided it was more acceptable to be (overtly) Jewish than to be considered an atheist. Today he declares himself somewhat befuddled and disturbed by both my sister's and my own interest in Judaism. My sister, Maralin and I are both presently involved with the Jewish communities in our towns. We take part in Jewish religious activities we learned about only as adults. My sister now leads as well as cooks for *her* seders! My father is more comfortable with his unaffiliated grandsons, however, and I am the somewhat befuddled and disturbed parent.

Unlike my father, my mother has apologized for not teaching us more. Unconscious of the effects of her own assimilation, my mother has said that she thought we would learn about Judaism by "osmosis", the way she did. In some ways our upbringings reflected similar assimilative trends. Her grandfather, Louis advocated letting her go to the movies on Shabbat with her friends when she begged to go as a teenager, even though they

both knew the Jewish tradition spoke of a different sort of day of rest. My mother taught me to keep kosher, and we had seven sets of dishes when I was younger - but one of those sets was for "traif" (unkosher) Chinese take out food. Some of the lessons she had learned were passed on to me more obliquely. Her grandfather, Louis lived with her family after Leah died. He continued working as a rabbi. She remembers being chased out of the room where he was instructing neighborhood boys in Hebrew and Talmud, because she was quicker to answer than the boys, and this made the boys look bad. Traditionally, formal instruction in Judaism has not really been considered appropriate for Jewish girls.

Throughout my childhood, being Jewish was about being patriotically American, associating mainly with other Jews, fitting in with American society and "making it" economically, while at the same time following particular customs and holidays brought from Europe. I remember many more "whats" than "whys". Being Jewish was also about wondering if "it" [the Holocaust] could ever happen here and if my fate would be the same as Anne Frank's if it did. Finally, being Jewish was about ethical and ethnic concerns, not spiritual ones.

I did not really question any of this until I left New York City at the age of 16 to attend college in central New York. I went there to learn to be a teacher. For the first time in my life I spent time with predominantly nonJewish, non-urban people. They taught me lessons I had not anticipated. The

first time someone in my dorm asked me why I lit candles for Chanukah, I found that I was ashamed of the elementary level of my answer. I found that my answers to their questions about Jews and Judaism in general were superficial. Their questions were new ones in my life. I began reading for answers.

These new acquaintances taught me that the foods I had grown up on in New York City were somewhat exotic and foreign, and that my desire for such sustenance made me a stranger in their midst. I learned to survive on their food and to savor my soul food when I could get it. They taught me that Jews actually made up a very small proportion of the American population.

I felt more vulnerable than I had growing up. I also became increasingly thankful that my grandparents had escaped the European Holocaust by emigrating in time. In addition, I wanted to learn more about this complex land they had chosen; I wanted to become more knowledgeable about the America beyond their experiences. The suburban Jewish students at the college also taught me about some of the variety within American Jewish experiences. I began studying "cultural identity," although I didn't realize it at the time. At the time I did not see any connections between this study and my intended role as an educator, nor did I see that my ideas about Judaism and Jews lacked a spiritual aspect.

Marriage and family. I have not returned to live in New York City for any extended period of time since I left for

college almost thirty years ago. I have lived in a variety of other places as I have followed my husband, Leonard's educational and job opportunities. He is also the Jewish grandchild of third wave immigrants. Marrying someone who was Jewish was one of the taken for granted things in my life. It was not something I made a conscious decision about. The son of a letter carrier and homemaker, Leonard is a college professor. More than anyone in our families, we have lived out of the "mainstream" of American/Jewish life, while endeavoring to keep alive a meaningful Jewish identity for ourselves and our two sons. We raised them in locations ranging from a small town in the mountains of Maine to the island of St. Thomas, a United States possession in the Caribbean. We now have a home in a small college town in the mountains of North Carolina. Our sons are grown now and living on their own. Part of this dissertation is being written at a university in Cholula, Mexico where my husband is a visiting professor for a year.

I think that living on the periphery of American society, and American Jewish society has made me more conscious of being Jewish than I would have been had I not left New York. For example, connected to our family's involvement with academic communities, our frequent moves when Adam and Joshua were growing up were always undertaken during the summer. Slowly we began learning our ways around our new neighborhoods and schools, becoming members of our new communities. At the same time I also found myself searching for the nearest Jewish

community with whom we might share the upcoming High Holy Days. At times this has involved some travel. Regardless of the location of these various Jewish communities, we have always found that we made personal connections with the people there. When the communities or congregations have been nearby, we have usually joined them. I have found that we share a calendar, a heritage and a consciousness with these communities that we do not share with our other friends, neighbors and colleagues.

An important aspect of our shared heritage is related to our families' experiences in America. Despite calendar problems and without minimizing examples of obstacles, marginalization or anti-Semitism, America has, I believe, overwhelmingly been the land of promise, and promises fulfilled for its Jewish immigrants. It *has* been a place of safety and opportunity. It *has* been a place where education has delivered on its promises to improve choices and opportunities. As an educator I have struggled to extend the invitations and promises of education to others.

Concerning the concept of "consciousness", I have found that for Jews who live outside large cities, no matter how they choose to act on their Jewish identity, there is often an awareness that Jews are viewed as a bit exotic and somewhat "other". The "norm", the usual, typical, taken for granted, unconscious view of "American" is of someone who is Christian. There is not a high level of knowledge about Judaism or Jews

among our neighbors and colleagues. If we attempt to change this and bring either into public discourse, we make ourselves public "strangers". One of the ways in which this gets played out concerns the calendar.

The rhythm of the calendar is one of the universal ways in which groups build and maintain their sense of identity, of cohesiveness. It gives structure to the practices that help groups define themselves. Within this structure, holidays provide regular times to break from the everyday routine. They are a time to get together and do "typical" things with the others in your group. For Americans, school begins in the Fall and ends in early Summer. We gather with our families and feast at Thanksgiving. We watch fireworks on July Fourth. Being Jewish has meant that near the beginning of the school year, I have also had to explain to school administrators, teachers and students about impending absences connected to the High Holy Days. These holidays have thus consistently established both connections and differences for me early in the school year. The pattern continued through the school year. What to do about the ubiquitous emphasis on Christmas? How to gather with family at Pesach (Passover) when public institutions are generally in session? What to do about the school and university functions and festivities that are regularly scheduled on Friday nights, when Jewish Sabbath observance and religious services begin? One of the constants of my adult life, and my sons' childhood years has been being aware of these differences from the

American "norm", and constantly having to make decisions about which of our communities to join and which to consequently oppose.

Knowing that living in these places meant there was little my sons could learn about being Jewish "by osmosis", besides seeking out other Jews, I made deliberate attempts to make the knowledge of Hebrew, the Jewish calendar, history, and rituals more a part of their upbringing than it had been of mine. Taking advantage of publications such as The Jewish Catalog we built *sukkahs* (temporary dwellings for the holiday of Sukkot) of pine boughs in Maine and palm fronds in St. Thomas. Shabbat evenings were set aside as a special time, and both boys got more of a religious education than I had. I have always wanted them to be proud of being Jewish. Not unsurprisingly, perhaps, I always assumed that they would eventually have to decide for themselves what being Jewish meant in their lives. I continue to hope that they consider the decision worth struggling over.

Spiritual/religious journey. This is the part of my Jewish identity that I have come to appreciate most recently. It is the one I have had the most difficulty relating to my basic secular Jewish identity and the one I feel the greatest ambivalence about. Initially my concerns about Jewish identity were connected to my attempts to raise these sons with a positive feeling for being Jewish while living in places

without large Jewish populations and my attempts to address the questions of students, colleagues and neighbors about Jews and Judaism. Now that my sons are grown, I find that learning more about Jews and Judaism has developed into part of my personal agenda. There is also a spiritual dimension to this search now.

This journey has been significantly affected by contemporary developments in Judaism. Twenty years ago I was part of a Conservative congregation when it voted to include women in its minyans. Women would henceforth be counted to see if the requisite number of Jews were present for communal prayers. Ten years ago I was called up in front of another congregation for the first time to say the prayer that comes before the reading of the Torah. I will always be thankful to my younger son, Joshua for asking me to do this during his Bar Mitzvah, and for teaching me the prayers. Seven years ago I followed another woman in my congregation and began joining those who volunteered to present the scriptural portion of the regular Friday night services. I gradually gained access to things denied my Jewish fore-mothers.

Four years ago, in graduate school I began investigating more fully what it was I had gained access to by reading modern theologians such as Abraham Heschel, Martin Buber and Judith Plaskow. I also began reading the works of other contemporary Jewish women. I find that their insights and analyses are adding much to the rich (albeit somewhat monocular) tradition

of Jewish scholarship developed over the centuries by Jewish men. They provide nourishment for me both as a Jew and as an academic. They have provided both an invitation and a pathway into the spiritual dimensions of Judaism. I have found that I am drawn to them. This attraction I feel is beautifully expressed in Denise Levertov's poem, "The Thread" (1961).

Something is very gently,
invisibly, silently,
pulling at me - a thread
or a net of threads
finer than cobweb and as
elastic. I haven't tried
the strength of it. No barbed hook
pierced and tore me. Was it
not long ago this thread
began to draw me? Or
way back? Was I
born with its knot about my
neck, a bridle? Not fear
but a stirring of wonder makes me
catch my breath when I feel
the tug of it when I thought
it had loosened itself and gone.

Having been so touched, I find that it has influenced parts of my life that I had hitherto considered strictly secular, such as my being an educator. I find prophetic Judaism's concerns with a spirituality that is enacted in seeking social justice to be compelling, and compatible with my secular educational goals.

Two major issues remain unresolved for me. The first concerns how I might work to enact these goals with people who speak and act from social and spiritual positions that seem far from my own. My second concern is connected to the fact that I am presently an educator of future public school teachers. It is not yet clear to me how I might let my secular educational

praxis be truly informed by my spiritual and religious concerns. I am still unsure how to reconcile this personally fulfilling study I have undertaken with this role.

I find myself returning time and again to Rabbi Hillel's famous trio of questions, asked 2,000 years ago. The first question is, "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?" If I extend "me" out to others like myself, to those I consider "we", then I have what Letty Cottin Pogrebin (1991) refers to as a "wandering we". She writes, "My priorities are forever shifting, upstaging each other, pulling me in different directions" (p.xi). It is a complex position to occupy. Just as for her, my "we's" often refer to family, other Jews, or other women. In addition, for me, another significant "we" is other educators struggling with issues connected to their own and their students' feelings of identity. The impulse to support, protect and be responsible for myself and those within my "we's" may be necessary for my/our survival, but for Hillel it does not stand alone as a good justification for actions or attitudes.

The second question further complicates the situation by addressing my relationship with others who may be "Other" because of differences between us. "If I am only for myself, then what am I?" While it is important to be an advocate for myself and the various and sometimes competing "we's" I claim, to *only* "be for" those like myself is to abrogate other

responsibilities I accept as a Jew; responsibilities to seek justice for all, to remember the basic dignity all human beings deserve, and to help heal, help improve the world. As Fein points out, to continue to struggle with both of Hillel's first two questions is to live at the intersection between particularism and universalism, and to feel its tension.

Hillel's final question, "If not now, when?" compels me to action. To believe in this is to hear a call to attempt to balance responsibilities wrought within the first two questions - *and* towards taking action. While it is important to be able to articulate these matters to myself and to those whose behavior I might be able to influence, these matters are not just for contemplation, or intellectual discussion, they are concerned with how I (we?) ought to be in the world.

Envisioning alternatives to "what is", deciding what actions would be helpful to bringing them about, even understanding the sometimes opposing pulls of my various "we's" and needs of others are the things with which I continue to struggle.

Educational career. It was always clear that I was going to go to college and become a teacher. In part this was because I liked children and I did fairly well in school. In my home secular education in general was encouraged. It was seen as an attainable, acceptable way for Jews to gain a firm foothold in middle class American society. My family encouraged me to see

teaching as a step up from my parents' white collar office positions and two steps up from my grandparents' working class jobs. Teaching was also presented as the ideal profession for women, because teachers might be home with their own children on school holidays. In addition, I was personally drawn to the notion that teaching was connected to improving the world, to helping people. Being a teacher seemed like a wonderful way to share; a way to help others learn about the opportunities possible in America. All the stories I had heard about education when I was growing up reinforced this view I developed of its manifold benefits. All in all, I was a fairly typical assimilated New York granddaughter of third wave Russian Jewish immigrants. As I was growing up, I did not reflect on the complexities embodied in these positions. Such reflections began when I left New York City to live among people who did not share this heritage.

I attended a public college in a small town 200 miles from New York City. There I decided to major in Education with a concentration in Social Studies. This concentration allowed me to pursue my interests in both history and the social sciences. I wanted to know more about how people through time and across space have dealt with each other and with the vicissitudes of life. It seemed to be central to educational concerns. Some of this interest came from the tales of other times and places I had heard at home.

It was not until I began teaching that I began to realize that what is taught in schools under the name of "Social Studies" is often unconnected to, or even in conflict with what children learn at home about their heritages and who they are. Looking back, I am chagrined at how readily I accepted the traditional views of history and society I studied then, and how ready I was to pass this tradition on to my students when I graduated.

This is in spite of the fact that I was aware that the questions I encountered outside my classrooms in college seldom connected to my university coursework. The questions came mostly from students whose backgrounds were different from mine, or from those who were opposed to the US's involvement in Vietnam. I slowly began to realize that they were important questions about what it meant to be a person of a particular heritage and how that might affect our interpretations of what it meant to be a patriotic American. These "extra curricular" questions raised many important issues for me, however I did not connect them all to "education". Along with many of my fellow students, I voted to close the university to protest our government's policy concerning Vietnam and our professors' disinclination to discuss this in class; we saw connections between ourselves and what universities ought to be concerned with.

At the same time, my nascent Jewish identity was developing along a parallel track. There was no expectation that what I

was learning in this area might be related to the official workings of the university, including calendar and curriculum. Nor was I aware of the absence of women in my official study of human experience. Upon reflection, I now feel that my assimilation into mainstream American society concealed elements of my own alienation from me then.

Perhaps because my subsequent teaching has included teaching American history in some out of the way, isolated places, the questions raised in school have continued to be an important part of my journey to this dissertation. The parochialism of my formal education became increasingly apparent to me as I moved around and taught. My first teaching positions were in the US Virgin Islands. From there I moved to the rural mountains of North Carolina. My understanding of what it is to be American was deepened by my students and colleagues questioning my views. For the most part, my students have come from very different backgrounds than I did. Our disparate understandings of what it meant to be American reflected very different experiences. My attempts to engage them in dialogue have involved continually re-examining my own assumptions. I have learned a lot about the histories of people who have not always fared well in America. I have not always known what to say to them, how to deal with our diversities, how to make room for all our stories, how to create a place where we all might become reflective about these heritages, and finally, how to work together to create humane schools and societies that

nurture critically conscious people. Sometimes I think the most difficult thing has been straining to maintain a sense of optimism for such a future and seeking to imbue my students with it. I often sought to expand their choices, and they taught me of the limitations of choice. Not everything is open to choice; identities "from above" limit and heritages shape cultural identity choices, for example.

A few examples from these teaching experiences might illustrate ways in which these issues have been part of my career as an educator. My first teaching position was in 1979, in a public junior high school in St. Thomas, where I taught American History. My West Indian students there were almost all poor and working class young people of color. I learned much about African roots of American history that year, as they were an important part of the official curriculum. Unlike the program I had studied ten years before, this school curriculum began in Africa, and then proceeded to the indigenous cultures in the Western Hemisphere which existed in the time before European expansion and conquest. Then the European story was added, like the third leg of a stool, to support the entity known as "American History". The curriculum, and the students in St. Thomas provided me with a new lens with which to see America's history. The old one has seemed inadequate ever since.

My students heard about my America, the great land of bounty and promise. I learned to see racism and imperialism I

hadn't seen before. My learning often happened when I tried to answer my students' questions about their ancestors' places in the story or about the general history of black people in America. One of their thorniest questions had to do with the our Civil War. It took place over a decade after the governor of the Danish West Indies (including St. Thomas) freed the slaves in response to their peaceful revolt. My students wanted to know why, given the pattern of manumission throughout the Western Hemisphere, white people in America still fought to keep black people in slavery. Their questions about American racism were troubling and made me analyze my own whiteness as I not done before. This inclusion of racial aspects of American history was very powerful; it made me search very hard for "our" America. Finding common ground with these young people was sometimes difficult. Ultimately, however, convincing them that it was possible for poor people of color to do better economically and find social justice in America proved beyond my limited "new teacher" abilities.

I am thankful that my experience teaching there gave me a deeper understanding for how important it is to include affirmation of the variety of peoples in America in school curriculum. Today I support this primary point of multicultural education. However, it troubles me that there was little psychic space in this school for me to affirm my support for multiculturalism by affirming a strong Jewish identity. Considering people primarily as members of almost homogeneous

racial groups leaves little room for inclusion of other aspects of our human variety. Another unresolved issue for me revolves around my conclusion that affirming *only* group identity also distorts considerations of cultural identity by squeezing the individual, with all his or her uniqueness, out of the discussions.

While teaching at this school, I also learned about some of the choices for people who attended a school where books were hard to come by, supplies almost non-existent, and the academic failure rate consistently around 80%. It was a school where the level of violence was usually at the simmering point. I learned in a very visceral way about how such surroundings can shape people's understanding of their choices and chances for changing their lives.

Years later, my mostly working class, white, Appalachian students in a North Carolina High School knew very little about either the heritage of my former West Indian students, or my own, equally foreign New York Jewish (immigrant) one. Many of my students in this rural mountain community spoke about an American identity that did not stem from immigrant ancestors. They saw their ancestors as Americans, not immigrants to America. Immigrants have come since the nation was started by those Americans, however, and if I chose to consider myself the descendent of immigrants than that was my decision. They would

just as soon I not pursue this line of questioning, however. It put distance between us when I was trying to create community.

I came to this school still believing in the power of education to improve people's lives. However, my struggle to make this condition, this offer, a real part of my students' lives continually brought home to me how closely their receptivity was tied to the connections they felt to me. For example, it was difficult for these students to consider me part of their "we". Many of their immigrant ancestors had arrived as the United States was forming as a nation. As Bauman points out in Modernity and Ambivalence, the building of modern, non-tribal nations depends on the residents being redefined as *friends*, and then these friends being redefined as *natives* and *patriots*. Connections, rights and privileges are extended to the other native/patriots, but no further. Foes are to be opposed, and strangers are to be convinced to either become friends, or be declared foes. I often got the feeling that my decision to position us all as the descendants of immigrants reinforced both their view of me as stranger and their own as natives instead of providing us with a common identity. The harder I tried to reveal the complexities I saw within the development of the American nation and American culture, the harder it seemed for them to accept me as a friend/native and my theories as reasonable and patriotic ones.

Equally alien for them was my emphasis on the multiethnic nature of American history and contemporary society. The school was located in a strongly homogeneous Protestant fundamentalist community, and my being Jewish also made me a social stranger in their midst. Their identities were also tied up in being Southerners. What I had always referred to as the Civil War was more familiarly known to them as the War Between the States.

This was the defining moment in American history for them. They often saw themselves as the descendants of people who lost their noble struggle for freedom and self determination. When I questioned their sense of resignation or their pessimism about bringing about positive change through united popular effort, they often told me, "That may be the way things happen in New York, Mrs. Bliss, but let me tell you about how things work around here." And then they would tell me of how the wealthy people had always run things around here. I felt that too often, the way they "knew" their history dis-empowered them and my attempts to help them change that understanding made me even more of a stranger in their midst; thus making it more difficult for them to believe anything I said.

As I taught, my students' and my "American" stories have rubbed against each other. Sometimes the resulting sparks illuminated sides of America we hadn't seen before - the similarities and differences in our heritages were brought into sharper focus. As a teacher, seeking connections to these diverse students, I found myself drawn to issues of cultural

identity. The longer I have taught, the stronger I believe that it is crucial for us to seriously struggle with these issues in our schools. My experiences have also taught me that this is a very difficult task. Our cultural differences in classrooms sharpen the struggle at the same time they make seeking a humane, supportive common ground even more important.

I am now involved in teacher education. Today these same issues about diversity and assimilation get played out with a slightly different focus as I seek to help future public school teachers understand these concerns. Another of my goals is for them to develop a critical consciousness about their own identities. Connected to this, in the Foundations of Education classes I teach, we have readings and discussions centered around the current controversies connected to multicultural education.

These future teachers exhibit the same enthusiasm for education as I did when I was an undergraduate. They too usually want to reproduce the best of their own educations in their future classrooms. Like the best of their own teachers, they want to be involved in "doing good" in society; they want to help people. They have succeeded in schools, and are often as unfamiliar with the experiences of those who have not as I was when I was training to become a teacher. In many ways our educational experiences have been similar, and we can find common ground when we speak of them.

Difficulties arise, however, when we discuss racial/ethnic issues. Most of these future teachers are part of a fairly homogeneous group of white, Protestant, working or middle class young men and women from North Carolina. Their education has generally not encouraged them to be reflective about their own religion, ethnicity or race (anymore than my own pre-graduate school education did). My attempts to introduce such reflection into their education is often resisted. It is perceived as extraneous and perhaps even counterproductive to their efforts towards becoming good teachers. It complicates things. It is too messy for school, and it (inappropriately?) brings up uncomfortable issues. There is no guarantee that our reflections and discussions will not be divisive, that we won't bring up issues that have no teacher's guide "solution." Sometimes they do not see the relevance of my teaching experience because they plan to return to their small towns to teach people like themselves.

When these students do begin to seriously struggle with the issues of multiculturalism in education, I find it troubling that they often have difficulty conceiving of ethnic differences without exoticizing both the differences and the people who claim that ethnicity as part of their identity. There are several issues linked to this. Too often ethnicity is seen as something foreign, an attribute claimed only by other people. Therefore, making such a claim (to ethnicity) increases the perceived Otherness of these (ethnic) people. Ethnic difference

is thus thought of as something which emphasizes differences and thus widens distances between people. This perception is disturbing for two related reasons. First of all, given the increasing ethnic diversity of the American population, there is a growing chance that my "non-ethnic" students will find themselves teaching ethnic children. Will they be sensitive, thoughtful teachers? Will they understand their students' struggles and confusions about cultural identity?

Even if ethnic diversity comes slowly to their particular geographical locations, however, my present students will be teaching about an increasingly ethnically diverse nation. This leads to the second issue. For me, one of the tasks of schools ought to be to strengthen the American democracy by expanding everyone's human rights and opportunities for equality. For the most part, however, schools are better known for their efficiency at sorting and selecting people for inclusion/exclusion and success/failure in American society than they are for promoting the development of a more democratic society devoted to the principles of equality and social justice. The latter goal is more important than ever in this time of increasing ethnic diversity and disparity between the rich and poor. Without clear road signs and illuminating ideas, this goal is proving to be a difficult one to achieve. Progress in this direction will require aware, thoughtful and committed teachers. They must have a deep understanding of their own

experiences in schools and society, as well as of the experiences of others.

Therefore, I have tried to join my students in becoming reflective, and in sharing these reflections. I still seek a way to reveal some of the difficulties that stem from being different from them without feeling as though I were simultaneously distancing myself. I share some of the conflicts I have felt as a Jew in American public schools, but still worry that doing so estranges me. At the same time, I am now convinced that to remain silent and not share my positions would also be alienating. Finally, although I want them to recognize that in an overwhelmingly Christian America, marginality and pain are sometimes a part of being Jewish, I do not want my students to know of Jews only as vulnerable outsiders in American society because Jews are integral members of contemporary American society.

Ultimately, I believe it is vital that we extend conceptions of the American community to those not presently in the mainstream, not contract it and further weaken bonds between those within and those outside this mainstream. I believe schools should be a part of this effort. Can we not create space for cultural particularity that does not lead to enmity between groups? Can we learn to cooperate without accompanying this with a drive to unnecessarily homogenize who we include in "us"? In my experience, schools are not often places where people are encouraged to come together to engage in thoughtful

reflection of both their heritages and possibilities for a future that includes more meaningful lives for themselves and others. As I become more convinced of the necessity for such thoughtfulness, I continue to wonder if schools can ever be the sites of such discourse.

I ask these questions even as I continue to develop my academic career. I plan to continue working with teacher education students; as well as developing positions about educational theories and practices, critiquing curriculum and providing multi- leveled educational counsel and guidance on issues such as multicultural education. As I pointed out in Chapter One, multicultural education can be understood in a variety of ways. My research is directed towards gaining and sharing a deeper understanding of this complex, important contemporary educational policy.

At the same time, my increasing involvement with Jewish studies has given me a new appreciation of the tensions inherent within contemporary cultural identities. I am an American Jew with an appreciation for the pluralism of American society and support for its continuance. Its existence is not only "good for the Jews", it is good for the nation. It creates a space where community might be created without the oppressiveness often associated with assimilation. In addition, without assuming uniformity within "Jews" or any other ethnic, religious or racial group, I want to note here that I draw great pleasure in belonging to this particular group. Judaism also offers

connections to people and a rich heritage that extends both back in time and across in space beyond the boundaries of America. It is alienating to have to leave all this outside my classroom. However, I am also an educator committed to supporting a social pluralism which encourages people to strive for a society where they extend promises of justice out beyond their particular group. Commitments to a common good must be forged across lines of particularity. I now seek guidance in negotiating this site of potential conflict.

I realize that there are a number of personal and professional issues here. The primary issue has several layers to it. One is determining my own identity, especially its Jewish component. Being conscious of one's identity might be considered a signature task for these times. Another layer concerns understanding how this identity affects my professional life. I work in public institutions; how is my identity expressed in my work? And how might it be? I continue to deepen my understanding of how my telling students that I am Jewish affects our relationships. I continue to question how our efforts dealing with this might affect my career as a college professor. Such integration of the personal and the professional run against the grain of traditional "detached" college teaching and scholarship. In spite of this, and the fact that this pursuit complicates the academic process, as a scholar I have come to appreciate those who promote just such integration.

Feminist scholars such as Jane Roland Martin (1985) have pointed out how isolating and alienating the "ideal of the educated person that has come down to us from Plato" (p.73). She also points out how the resulting standards for excellence in scholarship and teaching have encouraged us to become scholars who devalue and detach from our emotions, our selves and our concern for other people - to the detriment of both schools and society. She points out that there is little room in this model of education "for education of action...[or] for education of other-regarding feelings and emotions" (p.73). I believe, as she does that nurturance and connection, traits often associated with women and "the reproductive processes of society" (p.75), *ought* to be as valued across the curriculum as rationality and autonomy, traits often associated with men and "the productive processes of society" (p.75), currently are. If they were, there would be more concern about the quality of the relationships scholars establish with their students and colleagues. This would be part of a new concern among scholars about connecting theory and practice of education to the creation of a society with more highly developed "nurturant capacities" (p.83). Building such a society will necessitate a redefinition of what it means to become educated or to join the community of scholars. My efforts to better understanding how issues of identity affect me as scholar and teacher are part of my participation in this needed redefinition.

Important guides along this part of my journey, as I seek to integrate my Jewish identity with my professional focus, are theologians Abraham Heschel and Martin Buber. They illuminate the prophetic pathway through Jewish theology and tradition, and offer modern ways to travel it. The prophets spoke to the ability of people to become involved in creating a more just society, and to the necessity of connecting this concern with their economic and political lives. This strand of Judaism is one that many people are looking to today for ways of reconciling their religious and social concerns. This integration of religious and social concerns is reflected in the influential journal "Tikkun: A bimonthly Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture and Society", edited by Michael Lerner. It focuses almost entirely on the relationship between Jewish traditions and current cultural, social and political matters.

For deeper understanding of contemporary Jewish identity, I must also understand the rabbinic tradition, particularly as it is being interpreted by feminist theologians. This tradition has been tremendously important in shaping Jewish thought and practice. Until recently, it has also been entirely a male prerogative. Judith Plaskow and Laura Geller are among the contemporary rabbis and theologians who are helping me see both how this limitation has shaped Jewish identity historically, and how it might be different now that women are joining the tradition. They, and writers such as Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Cynthia Ozick and Susannah Heschel offer direction in

negotiating the difficult pathway I am traveling towards an integrated feminist Jewish identity.

Finally, additional companions on my journey are other educators who are Jewish and seeking to thoughtfully incorporate their Jewish identities and sometimes their prophetic vision into their work in public institutions of higher education. I include here people such as Roger Simon and David Purpel. Their work reflects these concerns, as does their joining with other academics to plan a series of conferences they have named "Mifgash: An institute for the integration of Jewish learning and secular scholarship". I am encouraged to find myself among so many other Jewish professionals as we individually and together struggle with these issues and questions today.

In the next chapter I will specifically examine a number of important contemporary issues of Jewish identity. I will begin with a feminist analysis of the traditional rabbinical discourse on Jewish identity in more detail. This will be followed by an exploration of the prophetic tradition and what if offers for a meaningful Jewish identity today. Finally, I will look to the work of some of these other Jewish professionals to better understand how secular educators' work may reflect both their Jewish identities and concerns for social justice.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND JEWISH IDENTITY

Feminist Critique

Sociologist Harold Himmelfarb has defined *Jewish identity* as "one's sense of self with regard to being Jewish ...what being Jewish means to individuals and the extent to which it is an important part of the way they view themselves in relation to others " (p.57). Jews have a long tradition of wrestling with issues of Jewish identity, especially as it is manifested through behavior. For at least 2500 years Jews have been writing about what it means to be Jewish. The backbone of Jewish scripture and later rabbinic commentary has been concerned with how Jews ought to think of themselves and others, and what behavior ought to follow from these conceptions. There has always been this heavy emphasis in this discourse on practice; on what one does because one is Jewish. Therefore, Torah, Talmud and the rest of this extensive religious discourse might be considered to be part of an ongoing conversation conducted by Jews concerned with how being Jewish ought to affect their relationships with others. (See Appendix, Note C for further explanation of traditional Jewish texts.)

This written religious discourse has always been an important source of information and inspiration for Jews. They have traditionally turned to it for help in making decisions

about enacting their Jewish identities. Harry Gersh (1968) emphasizes their place in Jewish consciousness with the following introduction to his book, The Sacred Books of the Jews.

> Judaism began in writings and became the most literate, the most book-intoxicated, of the world's great faiths. Judaism bars worship of any physical thing - animate or inanimate - and so the Jews did not worship their books. But study of the sacred books is a form of worship and is required of Jews. (p.11)

Until recently, however, this study, this worship, this entire important conversation was conducted almost entirely among Jewish men; by custom and the law that was built around it, Jewish women were excluded from participating. Instead, Jewish women were instructed to listen and adapt to what they heard their men tell them about what being Jewish means. They were "passive recipients of a nonrepresentative system" (Fishman, 1989, p.42). When the discourse referred to "Jews", traditionally it often inferred "Jewish men".

Although there was no place for Jewish women to participate within the traditional religious discourse, beginning in the nineteenth century there were alternatives. Susanah Heschel (1983) points out:

> By the nineteenth century, some women were able to elude rabbinic strictures over their lives and seek [secular] educations and professions as well as changes in the expectations of their husbands and families. In poetry, fiction, essays and through organizations, the position of women in Judaism was challenged. Leaders of the Reform movement in Central Europe and the *Haskalah* movement

> (Enlightenment) in Eastern Europe rejected women's positions in the synagogue and the traditional roles of women and men in the home. (p.xiv.)

In contrast to the breaking away from traditional religious discourse that these earlier efforts generally involved, today, especially in the United States, a number of Jewish women are asserting both a strong Jewish identity and a determination to engage in the on-going religious discourse on Jewish identity as "full members" (S. Heschel, p.xv). They do so, nourished by both their Jewish and modern feminist identities. There is an underlying "assumption that feminism is 'good for the Jews'" (Bershtel & Graubard, p.263) in their work; that serious consideration of women's concerns will lead to more meaningful Jewish identities for both Jewish women and men.

Speaking as Jews, and as women, Jewish women are challenging and seeking to reshape the traditional, Halakahic conceptions about Jewish identity. With a deep understanding of how words influence meaning, they are paying particular attention to the words that have been used in this discourse. As participants in the discourse, they are seeking to better understand the impact of patriarchal language on the worlds Jews have striven to create and live in over the years. With the understanding that "Ritual is the formalized, systematic enactment or expression of a culture's values and beliefs" (Pogrebin, 1991, p.56), they are likewise analyzing how Jewish rituals have affected Jews' "sense of self". New rituals and

prayers are being devised, new histories written. The very conceptions about all three of the interrelated concepts that underlie Jewish identity; God, Torah and Israel are being questioned and reconceptualized in modern ways.

For Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Susannah Heschel and others, this critical questioning and reconstruction is often explicitly said to be in the pursuit of justice *among* Jews. The pursuit of justice among Jews and between Jews and nonJews that will help heal and repair the world (tikkun olam) has long been promoted as an important part of Jewish identity. These Jewish women today accept this idea, and support the traditional idea that this pursuit is desirable. Judith Plaskow (1991) and Cynthia Ozick (1983) are among those who have pointed out, however, that the traditional (rabbinical) ways of defining this pursuit; this "right ordering of society" (Plaskow, p.217) has been unjust to Jewish women. Since "rightness" connotes justice, they present this modern opportunity to reconsider Jewish identity as a chance for all Jews to engage in the pursuit of justice.

As women engage in this modern effort to define their own Jewish identities, they often claim powerful metaphors from within the Jewish heritage developed by Jewish men. For example, there are several recurring images in contemporary Jewish feminist literature from the Passover seder. This yearly commemoration of the Israelites liberation from Egypt is one of the most celebrated Jewish holidays in America.

In the retelling of the story, which is part of its celebration, Jews are admonished to think of themselves as part of that ancient community. The community knew slavery, and was/is reminded to behave accordingly, now that they live in freedom. It is the wicked child in the telling who does not acknowledge the link, who wants to know what happened to "them", and not to "me". Judith Plaskow is among those who uses this image today as she explains why she is part of the contemporary effort to reconstruct a Jewish identity based on "women's increasing involvement in naming and shaping the Jewish tradition" (p.ix). To do otherwise is to be the wicked child, "handing over Judaism to *them*, denying my own power as a Jew to help shape what Judaism will become" (p.xii). *They* are the Jewish guardians of traditional (pre-modern, patriarchal) Judaism in which women are seldom called to help define "our" Jewish identity.

In this vein Ellen Umansky (1992) also writes of her frustration, anger and sadness as she struggles to fulfill her "obligation as a Jew to help create a Judaism that is meaningful for my generation" (p.234). The difficulty of the challenge is in large part due to the fact that her research into the history of women's roles in Judaism led to her understanding how Judaism had developed into a religion "By and for" men. She writes:

> The misogynism of the rabbis, made clear in legal and nonlegal material, the development of a liturgy exclusively focusing on male images of the Divine, and the exemption of women from important religious obligations,

> including study and communal prayer, led me to conclude, with great reluctance, that women were more peripheral to Jewish life than I had wanted to believe. (p.233)

She found her childhood "Jewish self-identity" increasingly inadequate where

> [B]eing a Jew simply meant being part of a particular historical and religious community to which I, and my parents, and ancestors belonged. [Where] it was my responsibility to understand Judaism's teachings and to follow them, not to question why we believed certain things but to accept those beliefs as my own. (p.231)

To accept beliefs that perpetuated a peripheral status was damaging to her sense of self and to her Jewish identity.

Umansky also found that her research, and her accompanying search for a more meaningful Jewish identity initially lead her to feeling anger "towards Judaism itself, [I was] ready to write it off as hopelessly patriarchal." But, like many other Jewish women today, Umansky does not withdraw like the "wicked child" and "write off" Judaism. It is too important to her. Instead, she becomes determined to become a part of the discourse about Jewish identity; to have an impact on it. She continues,

> But more recently, I've come to redirect my anger. It's not Judaism itself that angers me but those who seem to have forgotten that Judaism has never been monolithic and that in every period of Jewish history Judaism has developed and grown. (p.234)

The task Umansky describes, that of helping in the ongoing process of creating a Judaism that is meaningful is made both easier and more difficult because she is now angry at particular

people, rather than at "Judaism itself". There are important reasons it is easier. First of all it points out that Judaism has developed and changed over the centuries. Plaskow cites as one of these significant changes, the reality that what is today considered traditional Judaism comes mainly from the decisions and commentaries of the rabbis. She urges us to remember,

> [R]abbinic Judaism itself was the product of enormous changes - a shift from Temple sacrifice as the center of worship, to study and prayer as the dual foci of Judaism. This profound change was perceived as a transition rather than a break only because the Jewish community willed it so, and undertook to reinterpret the past to meet the needs of a radically different present. (p.xviii)

Responding to new conditions through thoughtful change may thus be considered part of the Jewish tradition. Indeed, Cynthia Ozick considers the crucial movement from Temple to Synagogue centered Judaism a "vigorous paradigm" (p.150) for concerned Jews today.

Plaskow does point out a modern development, however.

> Feminist changes may seem more threatening than the changes of the past because they are proposed with the consciousness and deliberation that mark our modern sensibility. Moreover, women's experiments may feel intrinsically un-Jewish simply because they represent women taking initiative within the religious sphere. In this sense, Jewish feminism does involve a radical discontinuity with the tradition: It constitutes a first attempt to make Jewish religiosity reflect the Jewish people as a whole. (p.xix)

Like many of the other Jewish women writing today, she is not afraid that what develops will no longer be Judaism because

she also believes that which changes endure, and which get cast aside will be decided in the traditional way. Some of the changes "will endure because they are appropriate, because they speak to felt needs within the community and ring true to the Jewish imagination" (p.xix).

Umansky's redirected anger demonstrates how she can work within the Jewish tradition to conceptualize changing it. She positions herself within the tradition, hoping that this makes it easier to affect it. The tradition calls for Jews to look to the religious discourse for help in determining how to live, what to believe. The source of such determinations is the Jewish community and how it interprets what has already been written into the discourse. The "answers" are not in heaven.

The following story from the Talmud demonstrates this point. The Talmud tells of three rabbis who are struggling to interpret a piece of the law. When one of them, Rabbi Eliezer, invokes the support of heaven for his interpretation - and gets it, the others remain unmoved. One of them, Rabbi Joshua, responds that this does not settle the disagreement because the correct interpretation does not lie in heaven. The story concludes that God is pleased when the "evidence of heaven" (Fein, 1988, p.32) is dismissed. God laughs with joy, saying, "My sons have defeated me, my sons have defeated me" (Bab. Met. 59b, cited in Fein, p.32).

Umansky and the other Jewish women writing today assume that God welcomes daughters into the conversation with the same

enthusiasm. This assumption is part of the grounding of this contemporary theorizing, despite the rabbinic tradition which has sanctified a God who "confirms and sanctifies the silence of his daughters" (Plaskow, p.3).

This emphasis on human community as the source of religious authority also exposes an impediment as well as assistance to Umansky's task. Umansky is participating in the creation of a strong, modern Jewish identity which recognizes the full humanity of women. The tradition makes the task more complex, because those who have had the authority to take part in the discourse are the very ones who have created a "self-enclosed and self-perpetuating" (p.69) discourse which systematically silences women and perpetuates their essential "otherness" and denial of full humanity. Those, like Plaskow who believe that "sundering Judaism and feminism would mean sundering my being" (p.xiii) find themselves opposing those Jews who have forgotten these flexible, humanly created parts of the Jewish tradition, but who nevertheless consider themselves the rightful guardians of the tradition. They are fellow Jews. They are intimate foes. They take a tradition in which Jewish women are seen only in terms of how they relate to the "normative" Jews, Jewish men - and uphold it as the one authentic immutable Judaism.

Many of the women writing today point out the tragedy of continuing this form of Judaism, the ways in which its maintenance does violence to other important values it espouses. They also speak of how it has hurt Jews and of their

determination to make this pain and injustice part of the discourse on Jewish identity. They point out that historically the Jewish passion for justice did not extend to Jewish women. They feel that the passion and the people dedicated to it would be strengthened by this inclusion.

Pogrebin remembers how she was excluded from the public Jewish rituals connected to the death of her mother because she was female. She writes:

> A man did it; one of the many Jewish male guardians at Judaism's gates did it. No woman who has suffered the anguish and insult of exclusion on top of the tragedy of her bereavement forgets that her humiliation was inflicted by Jewish men....in the act of defending custom or tradition, men violate more profound precepts of Judaism. (p.55)

Pogrebin is very clear about how this tradition conflicts with other Jewish traditions and values. She continues:

> Custom and patriarchal rules fly in the face of far more fundamental mitzvot - instructions to pursue justice, love mercy, care for the weak, show empathy for the stranger, and practice lovingkindness toward all human beings. This glorious ethical mandate, the core message of the Exodus experience, the moral system revealed to the Jewish people at Sinai, is breached in the name of the small, base custom of controlling women's spiritual autonomy - and is breached by men who consider themselves holy. (p.55)

Along these lines is Cynthia Ozick's observation that one great "Thou shalt not" - "Thou shalt not lessen the humanity of women" - is missing from the Torah (p.5) and much of the rest of the official discourse on Jewish identity. For Plaskow, Pogrebin,

Ozick and the other women writing today, Jews, because they are Jews, must work to remedy this injustice.

Taking note of the sometimes "profound and wide-ranging" (Bershtel & Graubard, p.260) conflicts that remain between feminism and traditional Judaism, other contemporary Jewish women nevertheless describe their ties to Jewish and feminist communities, and their commitment to both. For example, Letty Cottin Pogrebin finds her feelings about her identity are complicated by the many "contradictions that coexist within a Jew who is a woman and a woman who is a Jew" (p.xii). She continues, however, that as a Jewish woman, she must interlace Jewish and gender issues. If she doesn't, she says of herself: "[I am] internally at odds with myself and externally vulnerable; I have no clarity of purpose; I cannot be sure why I am here or where I belong in the world" (p.xvi). In a similar vein, Gail Shulman (1983) has noted, "My examination of my life as a feminist has resulted in the positive discovery that one source of my feminism my identity as a Jew" (p.109). She seeks to affirm her "Jewishness" (p.109) and her commitment to supporting "profound change" (p.108) to the parts of traditional Judaism that deny women the status of "full persons" (p.109).

> [I]t is my very Jewishness which is at the root of my feminism. Feminism is a prophetic movement concerned with justice for the oppressed, compassion for those who suffer, a sense of history, of community, of righteousness, and the courage to live in opposition....my feminism is enriched by and rooted in my Judaism, and so the two are in a sense inseparable. (Shulman, p.108)

Batya Bauman (1983) has also noted "Jewish feminists are confronting the recognition that our Jewish heritage, to which many of us have clung so stubbornly, is totally patriarchal - and in a patriarchy, women, by definition are subordinate" (p.94). Bauman's pull to remain within this "self-negating structure" is two-fold. First, she has feeling of responsibility. She is

> [A] link in Jewish history, a history in which so many women as well as men died just because they were Jews and in order to remain Jews. Over the past half century we have seen two monumental events- the Nazi Holocaust and the rebirth of Israel. Both act as epoxies which keep us bound. (p.94)

Summoning this traditional Jewish metaphor, she asks, "How can we, after all that has come before us, break the chain?" Second, Bauman joins other Jewish feminists in averring:

> [W]e do not want to stop being Jews. In spite of all, many Jewish feminists are feminists because we are Jews. Our Jewish heritage is one of activism in the cause of freedom and justice. Paradoxically, our Jewish experience has taught us the importance of feminist issues. (p.94)

Like other Jewish women today, she does not want to break the chain; she actively and thoughtfully wants to help forge the next link.

Sylvia Barack Fishman notes that this present Jewish feminist movement began in the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of both a general feminist movement and an environment that "nurtured utopian movements." She further describes the time as

"antiestablishment" and "antimaterialistic" (p.6). Fishman continues, "Jewish women began to examine the inequalities and forms of oppression in Jewish life and, at the same time, to explore Judaism as a culture and religion from a feminist perspective" (p.7). For some of these women, their Jewish identities were strengthened by the "presence of anti-Semitism within the ranks of the general feminist movement" (p.12), and I would add, the growing interest exhibited by Americans at this time in both ethnicity and spirituality.

Susanah Heschel also traces the beginnings in the 1960s of this most recent wave of Jewish feminism, noting its debt to the larger feminist movement. S.Heschel writes:

> [F]eminism's central insight contends that not only do women not shape and control their lives, but that our most basic understandings of human nature are drawn primarily from men's experiences. A patriarchal outlook begins by making men's experiences normative, equating the human with the male. Not only are women excluded from the process of shaping the outlook, but women's experiences are projected as something external, "other" to that norm". (p.xxi)

S.Heschel draws on Simone de Beauvoir (1972) who has explained this point. De Beauvoir wrote,

> Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being....She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the Other. (p.16)

Judith Plaskow describes de Beauvoir's argument this way:

> [M]en have established an absolute human type-the male-against which women are measured as Other. Otherness, [de Beauvoir] says, is a pervasive and generally fluid category of human thought; I perceive and am perceived as Other depending on a particular situation. In the case of males and females, however, Otherness is not reciprocal: men are always the definers, women the defined. (p.2)

Plaskow goes on to explain why this is important to realize

> [L]ike women in many cultures, Jewish women have been projected as Other. Named by a male community that perceives itself as normative, women are part of the Jewish tradition without its sources and structures reflecting our experience. Women are Jews, but we do not define Jewishness". (p.3)

In the United States today Jewish women are beginning to become seriously involved in just such defining. These Jewish women are a highly educated group and are joining the discourse with gusto. Publishers are taking note of both the "outpouring of new books that twin the religious and feminist impulses of Jewish women" (Rahel Musleah, 1993, p.33) and the enthusiastic public awaiting these books. At a time when less than one fifth of the general population has a college degree in America, two thirds of Jewish women aged 25-45 have at least this level of education (National Jewish Population Study cited by Musleah, p.33). According to Fishman, in addition, "Young American Jewish women today are far more likely than their grandmothers were to receive some formal Jewish education" (p.49). How is their interest and concern, their naming and defining Jewishness, affecting the discourse?

Jewish women today are finding various ways of claiming both the Jewish tradition that has generally inscribed them as "other" and the right to reconstruct that tradition so that it comes to reflect their status as normative Jews, as full members in the Jewish community. There is a general insistence on being taken seriously as women and as Jews, but beyond this it is difficult to make general statements about what is changing because women are adding such diversity to the discourse. This diversity is based on their wide range of areas of expertise, and their varied secular and religious concerns.

One of the results of this is the addition of rituals to mirror those traditionally celebrated for boys. For the first time, even in "strictly Orthodox circles" (Fishman, p.44), there are substantial rituals recognizing the birth of baby girls and their later acceptance into their respective congregations. There are now both synagogue and home based commemorations for the birth of baby girls. Fishman notes that "neglected customs have been revived and new customs have arisen to give both mother and daughter the opportunity to mark these momentous events" (p.44). It is also now almost as common for girls to have Bat Mitzvah ceremonies when they are around 13 years of age as it is for boys to have Bar Mitzvah ceremonies. Before the 1980s Bat Mitzvahs were not common, and there are a number of women who have undertaken Bat Mitzvah ceremonies to make up for this. Doing so provides the opportunity for "both a renewed commitment to Judaism and a feminist assertion of personhood"

(p.44). These new rituals, and others celebrating additional life cycle changes and calendar holidays such as Rosh Hodesh (the new month) demonstrate women's increasing demand to be "public" and well as "private" Jews; to be Jews taking part in Jewishly communal activities.

There are women who are seeking to re-interpret customs without necessarily changing their practice. One example of this is those Orthodox women who are (re)claiming the ritual of the *mikvah*, the ritual bath which women are instructed to immerse themselves in a week after the ending of each menstrual period. The mitzvot (commandment) of the mikvah is to mark the end of the ritual impurity women are said (in Halakah) to undergo as a result of childbirth, and regularly as a result of their menstruation. Among other things, during the time of their "ritual impurity" they are not to defile any Jewish male through physical contact of any sort. There are women today who say they are "taking back the water" and re-interpreting the tradition, attempting to "free" it from the scriptural and rabbinical connections to menstrual taboos without trying to change the practice itself. They seek to make the mikvah accepted within their Jewish communities as a commemoration of feminine dignity and an appropriate opportunity for building bonds of "sisterhood" (Cited in Pogrebin, pp. 63-64).

Other women who are also seeking to work within the tradition by appealing to those who claim the authority, rather

than by challenging that claim are those women who are fighting to get the rabbis to seriously consider the situation of the *agunah*, the "chained wife". As Plaskow reports, "Jewish divorce law, rooted ultimately in Deuteronomy 24, gives a husband the nonreciprocal right to divorce his wife by writing her a bill of divorce (get)" (p.62). Although there have been efforts by the rabbis to mitigate the effects of this on women, there has not been an effort to deal with the basic inequality of the law. The result is that

> [D]ivorce remains open to abuse by angry or punitive husbands who either refuse to write a get or use a wife's need for one to extract money or other concessions. Moreover, if a husband disappears without witnesses to his death, his widow or abandoned wife, unable to divorce him, can never remarry [within Jewish law]. (p.62)

Modern rabbinical courts can compel a husband to divorce his wife, which would help some of these women. There is an effort to get the rabbinate to "use its prerogatives, the powers given to them by halacha - such as shunning, coercion, and physical force - to compel husband to alleviate the misery of their chained wives" (Pogrebin, p.200).

There are those who are going further. Pogrebin refers to them as *radical traditionalists*. She describes them as those "who are bending and stretching Orthodoxy so that it accommodates Orthodox women" (p.64). They are taking "*possession*" of the traditional texts, the sources of authority concerning the discourse on Jewish identity, and "using them as

implements of change" (p.69). She cites many examples, including Umansky and Ozick's using "the most basic precepts of Torah and halacha to argue for equal justice for women" (p.69). Another of her examples is Talmudic scholar Judith Hauptman's insistence that "Judaism was meant to keep evolving" and Hauptman's finding "justification for egalitarian re-vision within the Mishnah and Gemara" (p.69). A third is Rivka Haut and other Orthodox women who are organizing Orthodox, women-only prayer and study sessions where they

> read from the Torah and recite liturgical passages normally monopolized by men....[These sessions] give knowledgeable, observant women the opportunity to perform aspects of the service that they would ordinarily observe from behind the *mehitzah*, and to play leading roles denied them in their own synagogues. (p.70)

(See Appendix Note D for an explanation of mehitzah.) Both these women's choosing to pray separately "rather than being relegated to separation by men" and their reading from Torah scrolls have "infuriated" some Orthodox rabbis (Fishman, p.47), but they persist.

In Reform and most Conservative congregations in the United states, this is not an issue because women are not denied access to the rituals of the services. After noting the contributions of all these women, Pogrebin then observes that most American Jews are not Orthodox. Therefore the issues are somewhat different for the majority of Jewish women. She wants these non-Orthodox women to realize that "gaining equal access to male

spaces and structures is not enough if, once inside, we mouth the same patriarchal words and concepts that kept us out in the first place" (p.59). Calling equal access a "partial victory", Pogrebin calls for women to have a "transformative" (p.60) influence on all aspects of Jewish life. Pogrebin feels that, "Unless she is willing to challenge our tradition's sexism from within, having her in the inside does not cure the intrinsic "outness" of Jewish women or correct the absence of the female perspective in religious life" (p.60).

Pogrebin describes the women whose contributions to the discourse on Jewish identity are just such challenges as *transformational feminists*, or those "who are changing and questioning the entire Judaic canon" (p.64). She includes in this group,

> [H]istorians who reconstruct the Jewish past as if women's experiences were central, not peripheral; liberationist feminists who affirm the authority of the Bible but redefine authority as partnership, not domination; writers and theologians who are creating new midrashim (imaginative writings that probe for new meanings behind the literal Bible); and poets and ritual- makers who are rewriting the liturgy and finding new ways to enact Jewish spirituality. (p.65)

I feel that Rabbi Laura Geller fits into this category. Geller (1992) recounts her rabbinical studies where she

> wrestled with a Torah that was on the one hand exhilarating and on the other hand excruciating, texts of liberation and texts of terror. I felt like I was sinking in quicksand, that I would have to choose between my heart and my liver, my sense of self as a woman and my evolving Jewish commitment. (p.244)

After momentarily rejoicing when she is told by one of her rabbinical school teachers the traditionally accepted homily, "There is no important moment in the lifetime of a Jew for which there is no blessing" she realizes that this is not true. There had been important moments in her lifetime for which there was no blessing -like when she got her first period. Realizing the fact that there was no blessing to teach her "how miraculous the human body is" or to name "the divinity present in this moment of transformation", this moment of connection to both the women who made her life possible and that divinity, she sees something missing in "the Jewish experience" (p.244). She goes on to recount how this experience, and other experiences such as getting ready to wean her son, propel her to "ask different questions of Torah" than the previous rabbis had asked, and to find new ways to "celebrate that which is holy in our own experience" (p.245).

Geller seeks prayers and rituals to do this, and in doing so adopts Monique Wittig's advice to "remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent" (Monique Wittig, 1969, p.89). She notes that this process must be done very carefully, but that it is an important one to engage in if people are going to develop an empowering way of understanding their encounters with the Divine Presence. People's image of God must be an inviting one that nurtures feelings of wholeness for this development. This process often entails taking "seriously"

rather than "literally" the traditional male descriptions for God (p.246). Echoing a theme of other transformationalists, Geller notes that people must engage in meaningful rituals and prayer if they are to "imagine a different kind of world where wholeness is real, a world where every human being can live as though he or she really were created in the image of God" and where she herself feels empowered "to work with other people to repair the world" (p.247). And so Geller adopts a traditional Jewish theme and adapts it so that it now speaks to the needs she feels as a Jewish woman.

Pogrebin chooses other examples of transformational feminists. Among them are Paula Hyman, professor of Jewish studies at Yale. Hyman is "attempting to alter the fact that we know more about how other cultures have dealt with Jews than we do about how Jews have dealt with Jewish women" (p.65). One of the topics she has written about is the experiences of immigrant Jewish women within the massive third wave of immigration to America. Their experiences are too often, incorrectly "subsumed into an immigrant experience whose patterns are defined by the [different] life histories of men" (Hyman, 1983, p.157). Hyman wants Jews to remember a fuller, more complete history than is now the case.

A final example of a transformational feminist to be considered here is Judith Plaskow. Recognizing the importance of images, she has endeavored to critically examine and reconceptualize all three of the "mutually reinforcing"

(Plaskow, p.122) central concepts that have traditionally informed conceptions and discussions of Jewish identity; God, Torah and Israel. In Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective Plaskow both analyzes and reconstructs all three. Rejecting this traditional order for their consideration, she begins with **Torah**, "God's gift"(p.121) from which "the Jewish understanding of God emerges"(p.122). Significantly it is also the foundation of the "living memory" (p.26) of the Jewish people and therefore shapes how the people (Israel) view themselves today. It is important to seriously consider what it says. Because everything in the Torah- including the encounter with God at Sinai when the Torah was accepted by the people, is told as if "the people" were only the men, Plaskow finds the record, and therefore the history inadequate and thoroughly biased. Since reading the Torah to tell the story of who "we" are as Jews and how "we Jews" came to be this way is part of religious services, it continues to affect how Jewish men and women view being Jewish. Plaskow makes a strong case for broadening Jewish memory to include both the experiences of the women *as they were understood by those women themselves* and add to the telling of the story that which describes *the process by which women were marginalized and excluded from the community of normative Jews.* How we interpret our history always informs our ideas about who we are, how we ought to be behaving and even our visions for the future. To be

the "wise child" rather than the "wicked" one, Jews must better understand their connections to the Jews of history and attempt to fill in the gaps when the memory proves to be partial.

This leads to the second concept, **Israel**, "God's chosen, formed and sustained through the choosing" (p.121). Who are these people who "remember" the covenant? The concept of community, of "the Jewish people", is basic to Jewish identity. Plaskow finds this emphasis on community in both Jewish and feminist ways of thinking. She writes:

> Any understanding of Israel must begin with the recognition that Israel is a community, a people, not a collective of individual selves. The conviction that personhood is shaped, nourished, and sustained in community is a central assumption that Judaism and feminism share. For the Jew, for the feminist, for the Jewish feminist, the individual is not an isolated unit who must contract for social relations. Rather, to be a person is to find oneself from the beginning in community -or, as is often the case in the modern world, in multiple communities. To develop as a person is to acquire a sense of self in relation to others and to critically appropriate a series of communal heritages. (pp.76-77)

Given this emphasis on community in the Jewish tradition, it is especially significant to note that when the "Jewish community" traditionally defined and described itself, women were absent, outside the community, peripheral to the community, enablers for the community, or potentially dangerous "others" to be controlled by the community. Finding the Jewish/feminist concept of "communal personhood" (p.76) attractive, Plaskow seeks to re-conceptualize the community, Israel, to one that

would acknowledge and respect the diversity within. She offers a vision of a distinctive, pluralistic Jewish community, based on concepts of mutuality and respect for difference, rather than one based on traditional hierarchalization and subsequent marginalization of some Jews.

As far as the third concept, Plaskow's analysis is based on the assumption, "To speak of **God** is to speak of what we most value" (p.7). In her examination of how God has been spoken about in Jewish tradition, Plaskow details the connections between the overwhelmingly masculine images and metaphors for God that have emerged from Jewish texts and the patriarchal social structure and concomitant male "normativeness" set up in these same texts. She notes, "The maleness of God calls for the silence of women as shapers of the holy, but our silence in turn enforces our Otherness and a communal sense of the "rightness" of the male image of God. Moreover, if God is male, and we are in God's image, how can maleness *not* be the norm of Jewish humanity?" (p.8). God in this scheme also becomes a distant, controlling, sovereign "Other", who supports and is supported by a patriarchal, hierarchical social order.

In order to change this traditional arrangement, Plaskow expresses an interest in not only "exploring", but also "transforming the metaphors for God that have formed the Jewish imagination and shaped Jewish self-understanding and behavior" (p.121). Indeed, warning against the idolatry of worshipping

particular *images* she speaks for "continual renewal of God-language" (p.136).

In doing so, she once again lays claim to traditional Jewish practice even as she seeks to re-imagine and re-construct how that process of continual renewal might be carried out in a meaningful way today. Plaskow feels that today the images must speak to both the diversity and community of the Jewish people and should "picture divine power not as something above and over us but in and around. God's power is not a power that dominates us, but one that elicits our power" (p.140). She offers a variety of ways this might be done, including re-conceptualizing the *Shekhinah*, the "indwelling presence" of God, also recognized as God's "female aspect" (p.138) within traditional mystical Jewish thought. In addition to these and other feminine images, Plaskow points to other empowering metaphors for a communal, diverse people to turn to. For example,

> Metaphors of God as friend and companion capture in different ways the closeness of God's relationship to Israel and the sense of striving toward a common goal. They suggest that God and Israel are mutually related and accountable as they join in the shared project of sanctifying and repairing the world. (p.163)

As powerful as these transformational arguments are, I should note here that the efforts of Plaskow, Pogrebin, S.Heschel and these other women to join the ancient discourse concerning Jewish identity are taking place in a somewhat contradictory context. On the one hand, they can be understood

as important representatives of a vibrant contemporary spiritual revival in the United States. Charles Silberman (1985, p.262) is one of those impressed by the "energy being released by the Jewish women's movement." He is optimistic that this energy "is likely to provide the most important source of religious renewal" for American Jews. On the other hand, they can also be understood as a small, albeit articulate group of well educated people who are taking part in an increasingly peripheral conversation in American society.

In response to modernity's secular challenges to Judaism and to Jewish people, many American Jews are choosing to drift away from the entire discourse concerning Jewish identities. For increasing numbers of secular, "unaffiliated" (Bershtel & Graubard, p.12) American Jews, being Jewish does not entail any particular beliefs or actions. As never before, participants in the discourse find themselves trying to convince other Jews that this is still an important conversation in which to listen and join in.

I find that they make some compelling arguments for me to do just that, join in. These Jewish women show me how (and why) I might act to strengthen my own Jewish identity. They illuminate paths I might follow; paths that make sense in the context of my own life. For this, I am grateful. In addition, they provide examples that might be helpful in understanding other aspects of cultural identity. They demonstrate how a tradition might be re-interpreted to both acknowledge diversity

and become more inclusive; how people can enlarge a community's sense of itself. In doing so, they bring themselves fully into the community, and create spaces for their voices to be heard when decisions are to be made. Despite past injustices and exclusions, they approach the process with love and respect for the community. They find good in what the community has stood for in the past, and envision a future where that good might be enhanced. Their thoughtful analyses are grounded both in that vision and these attachments to the community. Their visions are also grounded in the certainty that by bringing their new concerns into the conversation, they can help bring about a more just community - and a more just world. Strengthened by this sense of empowerment, they are consciously re-constructing as well as analyzing. Insofar as these times call for choices to be made about Jewish identity, and cultural identity in general, joining them is certainly presented as reasonable and responsible choice. They also reflect the perplexities and complexities of searching for identity, especially in the relationship between their identity as women and their identity as Jews.

Prophetic Traditions

Geller, Plaskow and Pogrebin explicitly include aspects of the prophetic tradition within Judaism when they describe their personal Jewish identities. The same is true for Fein, Lerner and other Jews cited in this and the previous chapter. They are all contributing much to the contemporary discourse concerning

Jewish identity. They share an interest in nurturing meaningful Jewish identities for themselves and other American Jews, and see this particular strand as one capable of contributing much towards this goal. Therefore, in this section I will specifically explore what they and other Jews find meaningful in prophetic Judaism and how they feel it can nurture meaningful contemporary Jewish identities. Referring to the issue of Jewish identity, Fein points out, "[I]n the end Jewish identity is not something one *has*, but something one *does*" (p.40). People's Jewish identity becomes enacted in how they behave, what they do. Fein and the others find that the precepts of prophetic Judaism provide a good framework for responding to contemporary Jewish, American (and more generalized "human") personal, social and spiritual concerns.

Prophetic Judaism recognizes the importance of people being compassionate to themselves and others and taking responsibility for doing what they can to make our societies and our world more just and loving places. This is a complex undertaking, balancing personal, particular, and wider universal needs. Although the biblical prophets spoke specifically to and about their fellow Jews, obviously one does not have to be Jewish to believe, and act upon a strong belief in compassion and social justice. However, Fein and the others speak specifically about their responses *as Jews* and it is this response which I will specifically explore here. Their

responses demonstrate one of the underlying assumptions in Judaism - that it is important to encourage correct and moral human behavior because of its ability to influence the future of the world.

The core of the prophetic tradition is reflected in the concept of *tikkun olam*, Hebrew for healing, repairing, restoring a sense of wholeness to the world. The work of tikkun olam is to be shared by people and God and involves our joint pursuit of our covenant of social justice. Plaskow has traced the development of this concept to its present form in which it encompasses goals of "social, political and religious transformation all reinforcing each other." She notes:

> In more recent Jewish writing, the Kabbalistic concept of *tikkun* with its eschatological dimension is united both with its older rabbinic meaning of just social order and the universalism of nineteenth-century radicals....Creating a just social order becomes a sustainable task when it is undertaken by communities rooted in Jewish practice and aware of the transcendent dimension of their work in the world. (p.220)

Plaskow and the others are exploring ways in which they might participate in just such communities. They develop various ways to each base their actions on the "supreme commandment" (A.Heschel, 1962, p.204) to behave justly to other people, especially those on the margins of our society. They strive to create a society which recognizes that we are each potentially a "Thou" as well as an "I". This is the source of decisions

concerning what is correct and moral behavior. It is important to note that for Fein and the others cited above, in many ways, the concerns and decisions about how to live their lives reflect *both* traditional Jewish concerns about how to (Jewishly) behave properly and contemporary Western moral concerns about identity. For American Jews today, questions about each are asked from within the context of the other.

The prophetic tradition in Judaism provides a framework for a dialectic between Jewish identity and American citizenship that Geller and the others find personally fulfilling, as Jews and as Americans. They are "at home" in America, and know that Jews have prospered here. "While America was not the Promised Land, it was the land of promise" (Shapiro, p.169) for Jews. In addition, they aver that operating within this framework which values compassion and connection above all else, will prove beneficial for both other Jews and other Americans. They do so realistically, acknowledging difficulties as well as celebrating successes they have had in their dealings with other Jews in the United States and Israel and with other (nonJewish) Americans, especially black Americans. Concerning the latter, Fein notes the importance of Jews who are concerned with social justice considering their moral responsibilities regarding black Americans in light of the fact that in the United States, "Jews are decisively among the haves, while blacks remain decisively among the have-nots" (Fein, p.251).

In addition, Fein and the others find that since the prophetic tradition has the power to be a force for good in the larger world beyond our national boundaries, there are serious ramifications to their decisions about how to behave. They never forget that within these actions lie the potential for tikkun olam, repairing the world.

The prophets, especially those who lived when Jews governed themselves in the "classical era in the history of prophecy" (A.Heschel, 1962, p.xi) preceding the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, fought against divisions between existential/religious and civic/political realms of people's lives. They knew that the choices one made in one area of life affected possibilities in the other. In addition, these prophets emphasized the necessity for people to remember their relationships with others in their society, and to pursue justice on behalf of those living on the margins of that society.

The prophets spoke up for those who were poor; those who were suffering. The pursuit of justice was demanded of everyone. As prominent modern interpreter of the prophets Abraham Heschel has explained, "[I]t is the supreme commandment, and one that cannot be fulfilled vicariously" (p.204). His examples of the prophets teachings include, Amos (5:15) enjoining the people to "Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gates" and Isaiah (1:17) directing everyone to "seek justice, undo oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for

the widow". Elsewhere Isaiah spoke about people pleasing God by sharing their bread with the hungry, taking the wretched poor into their homes and clothing the naked. For the prophet Micah (6:8) what the Lord required of each of us may be summed up by: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God. In addition to these general admonitions, rich and powerful people were sometimes specifically reminded of their responsibilities towards the needy (as in Jeremiah 5:27-28, Micah 3:9-10, and Isaiah 3:14-15).

One of the ways the contemporary "rediscovery of prophetic Judaism" (Fein, p.219) can be understood is in terms of economically (and physically) secure American Jews once again feeling the weight of those responsibilities. As Fein notes in Where Are We?: The Inner Life of America's Jews:

> [F]or the last 200 years, Jews have been struggling to come to terms with the Emancipation, which marked the end to their exclusion from civic affairs. And for the last fifty years, America's Jews have been wrestling with what it means not merely that their exclusion is over, but that they have actually come to a measure of power. That is a condition that rabbinic Judaism did not foresee and for which it did not prescribe, except coincidentally. And one of the principal ways in which most Jews these last two centuries have tried to come to terms with the radical change in their circumstance is reflected in their rediscovery of prophetic Judaism. (p.219)

No longer only sojourners in strange lands, Jews have now achieved a remarkable level of safety, acceptance and integration in the United States. Historian Edward Shapiro

points out "America's Jews today comprise the wealthiest and most influential diaspora community in history" (p.169).

Another example of this "radical change" in circumstances that has affected Jews all over the world is that in the location of the ancient one, there is now a modern Jewish nation-state, Israel. Despite these joyful things, when Fein and the others who celebrate this rediscovery of prophetic Judaism look at the world, they see the many plagues which still beleaguer Jews and the rest of humanity. They are especially distressed that the most terrible things on the list have been created by human decisions and actions because people are capable of behaving so much better. Included in the list are worsening world wide environmental degradation; increasing levels of poverty in the world; continuing deadly clashes among people who insist on separating themselves from others along racial, religious, tribal or national lines; persisting undemocratic, oppressive situations, and a heightening sense of alienation and social disintegration in some of the most prosperous and "advanced" nations - including the United States.

Specifically concerning the current situation of American Jews, they understand why previous generations of Jews felt the lure of assimilation, and do not denigrate the material rewards that followed. What saddens them is that another result of assimilation into American society has been a tendency for the "equating of Jewish life with the endeavor to become materially

well-off and accepted" (Lerner, 1986, p.9). They understand why increasing numbers of American Jews continue to drift away from (this way of) being Jewish. They are conscious heirs to a Jewish tradition of hope and belief that things can be better in the future. They reject the thought that any of these situations is inevitable and intractable. They seek to act, as human beings, and specifically as Jewish human beings to help bring about desirable and necessary changes. Also within Jewish tradition, they speak in terms of their particular responsibilities to take such action, responsibilities to God and other Jews, and other people in general.

This is not to imply that "they" speak with a uniform voice about all this. Their varied interests and vocations affect their language and interpretations. For example Geller's work reflects her position as a rabbi and Lerner's his position as a social scientist and journal editor. In addition, their work reflects a varying degree of concern with gender issues. For Plaskow the writing of the prophets "is filled with contradictions" that should be kept in mind. For her, "The prophetic identification of faith with social justice and its correlate, that God needs human beings to act justly, does not annul the militarism or patriarchal character of prophetic imagery; nor does it alter the prophets religious intolerance or their lack of concern for justice for women" (p.216). Ultimately, however, she finds, "Feminists can affirm our debt

to and continuity with prophetic insistence on connecting faith with justice, even while we extend the prophets' social and religious critique beyond anything they themselves envisioned" (pp. 216-217).

The same debt may be acknowledged to Abraham Heschel, whose work did much to make the prophets demands comprehensible and relevant for these times, but whose writings are not sensitive to gender issues his daughter (noted Jewish feminist Susanah Heschel) and others, (including his student, Michael Lerner) have raised since his death in 1972. Abraham Heschel's interpretations and commentaries on the prophets and on human and Jewish identity written in the 1950s and 1960s continue the Western and Jewish traditions of only using "Father" and "He" for God and "man" and "men" to describe both all Jews and all people. Susanah Heschel has written that her father always encouraged her inquiries and feminist concerns although he did not personally pursue them (S.Heschel, 1990, pp. 202-203). I struggle to read myself and other women into his eloquent and impassioned descriptions and take them "seriously" rather than "literally" (see Geller, p.246).

Abraham Heschel's "work" includes his writing, lecturing, teaching and involvement in the 1960s Civil Rights movement in the United States. Through them, he has had a profound effect on modern understandings of human identity in general and Jewish

identity in particular, and especially, of the prophetic tradition.

In Abraham Heschel's (1965) Who Is Man? he wrote about what it means to be human; what underlies his (biblical) understanding of "human identity". It also is the basis for much of the prophets' message for today. It begins with the understanding that we are all beings who can choose between courses of action. The essence of our humanity lies in the fact that we are conscious beings who must decide how to live. As Heschel explains it, we must inevitably ask, "How should I live the life that I am? My life is the task, the problem and the challenge" (p.36). Living as a human being also always means living with other human beings. In fact, "to be" human is "to be with" others. All decisions about how to live must be made in this context. For Heschel,

> Man in his being is derived from, attended by, and directed to the being of community. For man *to be* means *to be with* other human beings. His existence *is* coexistence. He can never attain fulfillment, or sense meaning, unless it is shared, unless it pertains to other human beings. (p.45)

For Heschel it is clear therefore that we must endeavor to behave morally towards others. "The moral deed is important not only because the community, for example, needs it. It is important because without it there is no grasp of what is human about my being human" (p.36). We should always remember that the "index of one's own humanity" is "the degree to which one is

sensitive to other people's suffering", to their own humanity (p. 46-47). Given this framework for moral choice, expectations (otherwise conceived as demands, requirements or commandments) can rightfully be made that people put forth an effort make good choices - good for themselves and for the world. It is within our power to make the right decisions. Our human decisions can make earth more a place of "justice, peace, love, and beauty" (p.75) than it now is.

Abraham Heschel ends this book with the admonition for all people to remember their responsibilities. "By whatever we do, by every act we carry out, we either advance or obstruct the drama of redemption; we either reduce or enhance the power of evil" (p.119). This is all related to the underlying understanding that there is purpose for and meaning to human existence. We are needed to help God make this world be as it ought to be. In other words, to be a human being is to be "a partner in the drama of continuous creation" (p.119).

Abraham Heschel does not limit this partnership with its pursuit of social justice to Jews, or more narrowly to Jews who follow the prophetic tradition. Jews may have agreed in a covenant with God to specifically accept the responsibility of being such a partner, but anyone was welcome to join them. Being a helpful partner of God is an opportunity for all people. This is an important aspect of prophetic justice.

A second is that it is a dynamic process. Heschel compares prophetic and Greek metaphors for justice. He finds the

"mechanical" balancing of the Greek scales to symbolize an abstract approach to justice that can be characterized by "stillness" (1962, p.215), "calmness, congruence, and precision" (p.212). While he supported the "essential thought of the rightful caution of the mind against illusions and partiality of the heart" that resides in the Greek image for justice of a "blindfolded virgin" (p.215) bringing two sides into balance with those scales, Heschel was drawn, instead to the "bold image" in Amos's admonition:

> Let justice roll down like waters,
> And righteousness like a mighty stream (5:24)

A mighty stream speaks of a justice that is "not a mere norm, but a fighting challenge, a restless drive" (p.212). It is a "never-ending, surging, fighting movement" (p.212) washing away obstacles to justice. One such obstacle is people's callousness to the injustices that often pass for "normal" in their society. They include "typical ingredients of social dynamics" (p.4) such as cheating in business or exploitation of the poor. For Abraham Heschel, "The image of a mighty stream expresses content, substance, power, movement, vitality" (p.215). It speaks about a "power that will strike and change, heal and restore, like a mighty stream bringing life to the parched land. There is a thirst for righteousness that only a mighty stream can quench" (p.213). This thirst led the prophets to pursue a restless, demanding and often challenging social justice. It led them to often say "No" to their society,

"condemning its habits and assumptions, its complacency, waywardness, and syncretism" (p.xv). The prophets knew that this mighty stream would change the consciousness of their people, convincing them that the pursuit of justice must underlie their relationships with each other and with God.

For Abraham Heschel, a third important aspect of this pursuit of justice that will heal the world is that it "exists in relation to a person, and is something done by a person. An act of injustice is condemned, not because the law has been broken, but because a person has been hurt" (p. 216). Justice speaks to "interpersonal relationship", since "[t]he claim of one person to attain justice is contingent upon the assumption that there is another person who has the responsibility to answer it" (p.209). Justice thus depends on people's answering each other's claims. It carries with it a sense of agency and responsibility.

Those people with more power to affect others' lives because of wealth or political power or social position are more likely to have claims brought against them. They have the responsibility to answer justly. A society might thus be judged by how the powerful people answer the claims of the disempowered, the oppressed. Within this justice, righteousness is "a burning compassion for the oppressed" (p.201). Where those in need of such justice are denied their claim, everyone in the society suffers.

For Abraham Heschel (1965), this is both what the prophets were trying to relate to their people and what he was trying to relate to his American contemporaries. People within societies that consider themselves "just" must address the claims of the people who have been marginalized and oppressed by that society. Susannah Heschel remembers.

> My father used to tell me and my mother that he often studied at a library in Germany during the 1930s that was run by Jesuit priests. Once he asked them why they never spoke out against what the Nazis were doing to the Jews in Germany, and they told him, "Because the Nazis might close our library." "Can you imagine," he would say, "measuring books against human beings?" When other professors would sometimes criticize him for getting involved in social problems rather than writing scholarly books, he would refer to that Jesuit library. With all his love of books and his devotion to scholarship, people always came first. (S.Heschel, 1990, p.204)

With this in mind, he addressed other educated Americans in the 1960s. Advocating promotion of knowledge that leads to more justice rather than more books and other material things, he wrote:

> The teaching of our society is that more knowledge means more power, more civilization-more comfort. We should have insisted in the spirit of the prophetic vision that more knowledge should also mean more reverence, that more civilization should also mean less violence.
>
> The failure of our culture is in demanding too little of the individual, in not realizing that there are inalienable obligations as well as inalienable rights. (A.Heschel, 1965, p.100)

For Abraham Heschel, one of those inalienable obligations was pursuing justice, and pursuing justice in the United States in the 1960s meant becoming involved in the Civil Rights movement. For example, he took part in the Selma to Montgomery march, reporting to his family, "I felt my legs were praying" (S.Heschel, 1990, p.206).

Abraham Heschel also suggested to Jews who "fiercely opposed" these positions and activities he undertook and did nothing themselves to oppose "the forces of racism in white America" that they were colluding with Pharaoh rather than following Moses (S.Heschel, p.205). He was concerned about the nature of Jewish identity. He wanted Jews to turn towards Moses, and pursue justice, for their own sakes as well as for the sake of society.

In the spirit of the ancient prophets he also inveighed against a Jewish identity based on "religious behaviorism" (1955, p.320). For him, the laws in Torah and Halacha were important for Jews, not as ends in themselves, but because they "disclose a way of finding God in life" (p.322). Performing the mitzvot (commandments) allows Jews to be present in God's presence; the actions "let Him enter our daily deeds" (p.312) when they are performed with *kavanah*, or "attentiveness to God" (p.315). It was important to Abraham Heschel that Jews did not deflate the spirit and intent of God's covenant with the Jews into a legalistic following of rules. The core of Jewish

identity should be our helping God through our acts of "justice and compassion", acts that enhance people's "dignity, welfare and security" (p.147). Our assistance is needed. If we decline to give it, we add to the brokeness of the world rather than to its tikkun.

For Heschel, people need the faith that is a "leap of action, accepting the responsibility that is ours for creating a just society, for bringing an end to war and to evil, [and] for making possible our redemption" (S.Heschel, p.208). The authors cited in this section are examples of Jews who are taking this leap today. Their actions demonstrate a variety of ways in which the prophetic tradition might be concretely acted on within the context of contemporary American life. Examples include activities such as Geller's remembering and inventing Jewish religious language and ritual. She writes of the importance of finding a blessing for after meals that affirms the idea "that we can help create a world where there is enough food for everyone" and that reinforces the idea that "how I eat and what I eat does link me to other people - the farmers who grew the food, the migrant workers who picked it, the ones who carried it to the stores" (p.246). She is also helping Jewish individuals sense the possibilities for a "personal tikkun" of wholeness that is the beginning of a process of empowerment and connection that can lead to the larger tikkun olam (p.246) where these connections are valued.

Plaskow cites another example of a contemporary "leap of action", crediting Marcia Falk, Arthur Waskow and Arthur Green for their input concerning a prophetic re-interpretation of the mitzvot attached to *kashrut*, or dietary laws. In doing so, they are also applying the prophetic tradition to contemporary American life. They have developed ways of keeping kashrut, which is "a central dimension of Judaism as a system of separations and distinctions" into a way of "connecting Jews to others without losing its meaning as marker of Jewish distinctiveness and identity" (p.236). Plaskow explains:

> Within Jewish communities seeking to connect faith and politics, new content poured into traditional Jewish ceremonies and forms often provides connections between visions of social and religious transformation and the basic rhythms of everyday life. The consonance of purpose between law and prophecy-to connect faith with the whole of reality-can be enacted in ritual and law attuned to the demands of justice...*Kashrut* is already a system reminding us of the sanctity of animal life, and some have suggested that, for the sake of this sanctity a well as for the sake of preserving the grain for the hungry, we extend this reminder to a full vegetarianism. *Kashrut* already tells us that "we are what we eat,"... Concern for protecting our bodies might take the form of prohibiting foods that are grown with pesticides or that contain carcinogens or hormones. Concern over the rise of hunger might be expressed in the form of a special blessing before or after meals and a commitment to set aside a proportion of the cost of meals to feed the hungry. Concern about the exploitation of workers and planting of monocrops on lands needed for local agricultural production might lead to forbidding foods that are the product of exploitation. (pp.236-237)

Heschel was concerned about the nature of Jewish identity, in part because like Plaskow and the others, he wanted Jews to

realize that they had an important destiny to fulfill - to live lives that demonstrated what changes might be possible in this world if people truly valued compassion and pursued social justice. He did not want the Jewish people to "immerse itself in the anonymity of a hundred nations all over the world, and disappear once and for all" (1967, p.112). Much would be lost, and no one would benefit by this. He was concerned both about American Jews maintaining a strong sense of their Jewish identity in America and their continued interest in and support of a just and secure state of Israel. To cease believing in Jews' partnership with a "God of mercy and compassion" and striving, as Jews, to bring this presence into the world, would be to tragically "continue the holocaust". Abraham Heschel lost many relatives in the holocaust. Living in the safety of the United States, he struggled with the problem of how to live in a righteous God's world at a moment in time when "Isaac was indeed sacrificed, his blood shed" (p.112). For Heschel, the path was, like Job to love God and trust in his judgment; not like Job's wife, to turn away from God and give up.

In a related vein, for Heschel the existence of the modern state of Israel allows Jews to "bear the agony of Auschwitz without radical despair, to sense a ray of God's radiance in the jungles of history" (p.115). He notes the importance of Israel's survival as a place of sanctuary for Jews, and wonders how many Jews might have survived the holocaust if it had existed earlier. When Heschel said that being Jewish meant feeling a

special bond for this place, no matter where one actually lived, he was voicing a traditional Jewish belief. Foremost, the tradition teaches that it is the place God has provided for Jews. In both traditional and contemporary discourses concerning Jewish identity, *Israel* is term with two aspects; both "a people" and "a place". Heschel is very traditional in his understanding of the relationship between the two. He wrote, "The Jew in whose heart the love of Zion dies is doomed to lose his faith in the God of Abraham who gave the land as an earnest of the redemption of all men" (1955, p.425; 1967, p.66).

It is important to note that Heschel intertwines this love with the message of the ancient prophets. He reminds all Jews that Israel is the place where they can renew the prophets ancient challenge. All must decide how they are going to participate in a Jewish state in a way that will help bring about peace and a just society there. Bringing the vision of the prophets into modern times, in the heady days following the re-unification of Jerusalem in 1967, Heschel envisioned a prosperous and peaceful Middle East where

> [Y]oung Israelis and Arabs could join in a mutual discourse of learning. The old prejudices could be replaced by a new comprehension and respect, born of a reciprocal dialogue in the intellectual domain. (p.185)

He recognized, however, that this future also needed a changed, less antagonistic attitude on the parts of the Arab nations surrounding Israel. Finally, he firmly felt that Israel

must also protect itself against hostile threats to its existence in order for it to remain an opportunity for our redemption.

Lerner and the other contemporary standard bearers for the prophetic tradition have kept alive Heschel's hopes and his belief that Jews everywhere should recognize a special bond with the land of Israel. In many ways keeping his hopes alive is more difficult today. The issues seem more complex, both in Israel and the United States. Israel has controlled the Golan Heights, West Bank and Gaza and their Arab Muslim and Christian peoples since 1967. Current peace efforts between Israelis and Palestinians are uncertain, the spark of peace celebrated by the Nobel prize committee now being dimmed by recent Palestinian terrorist acts. Israel now has peace agreements with two of its neighbors, Jordan and Egypt, but apparently still no friends in the Middle East. Israelis are still not physically secure. In fact, the peace with Egypt is inevitably described as a "cold peace". Northern neighbor, Syria, has taken over much of Lebanon and is still sponsoring terrorism against Jews worldwide. Against this background, one of the most difficult tasks of American Jews who are carrying Heschel's vision into the future has been to keep alive the prophetic messages of Jewish responsibility and realistic hope concerning the State of Israel. Along with them, I recognize a personal bond with this place and feel that it is important to include it in efforts directed towards tikkun olam.

In his 1986 "Founding Editorial Statement" for *Tikkun*, Lerner wrote how his concerns about Israel were connected to his efforts towards healing and repairing the world. He wrote of being aligned with the religious peace movement in Israel,

> [A]n approach that is passionately committed to the survival of the Jewish State but is equally strongly committed to making Israel a society that embodies in its daily practice, including in its dealing with Palestinians, the moral imperatives of Torah. (p.11)

At the same time he works to change things within Israel, he decries the hypocrisy and antiSemitism of those who verbally attack it and who note only its shortcomings. He realistically neither ignores the worldwide acts of terrorism against Jews nor believes that the "hostility of Israel's Arab neighbors would disappear if Israel were to propose a just solution to the Palestinian issue" (p.11). He does, however, remain committed to working with those in Israel who are seeking peaceful ways of addressing the Palestinian claims to "the same right of national self-determination that Jews rightly claim for themselves" (p.11). Within Lerner's realism there is a (prophetic) refusal to accept the current situation as acceptable because it appears to be "given" or inevitable.

Concerning Israel, Plaskow adds her own hopes that it will find "modes of self-preservation compatible with and productive of a just society" (p.118) that deals equitably with its "diverse communities". These include its Jewish and nonJewish

communities and also its ethnically varied Jewish communities. Plaskow also points out that belief in social justice includes promoting changes towards greater equality for Israeli women.

In Deborah, Golda and Me, Pogrebin recounts her experiences in Israel, and how they strengthened her resolve to work towards peace and justice there as well as in the United States. These experiences have led her to work for the rights of Israeli Jewish women through organizations such as The International Committee for Women of the Wall. Another has been to become involved with peace organizations. She has worked very hard to establish official and personal dialogues with moderate Palestinians. She declares herself to be with those Jews and Palestinians who advocate "open dialogue, negotiated settlement, two states for two peoples- and security through peace" (p.346). Pogrebin's answer to the often asked question *"What role should American Jews play in the Israeli political situation?"* is straightforward. "The answer is, when a family member is in trouble, it is a moral responsibility as well as a loving act to tell them what we think" (p.353). Very much within the prophetic tradition, the roles she continues to play center around her belief in the importance of Jews everywhere each helping make Israel a place of justice and peace.

As I have said, Pogrebin, Plaskow, Lerner, Geller and Fein at the same time are also "family" to other Americans. They are "at home" in America, and feel a strong sense of responsibility

about its condition. They are concerned because they consider themselves to be Americans who have been nourished on its ideals of democracy, liberty and equality as well as Jews whose "vocation" (Fein, p.261), "purpose" (Pogrebin, p.297), "instructions" (Lerner) and/or "meaning" (Geller, p.243) involves making this a better place, for ourselves, for others, and for God. Jews are *supposed* to "help repair this fractured and despoiled planet, to hasten the day when each shall sit under his [or her] own fig tree and none shall make them afraid" (Fein, p.261).

The prophetic tradition calls us to remember our innate sense of responsibility for one another and our moral responsibility for "tikkun olam" - helping heal, repair and transform this world we live in. The world is not whole yet. God needs our help for its continuing creation towards this shared goal. The tradition reminds us that the work of this vital task will take place in the practical details of people's lives - in their workplaces, homes, schools, places of government and worship. The potential for acting on our instincts for justice and thus bringing about social change is always there. Lerner points out that even Jews who do not use "religious language" to articulate these insights can still be part of this "tradition that insists on the ontological primacy of human relatedness" (p.8).

In the United States, I agree with those who point out the potential is even greater than at most times and places Jews have lived. Admittedly, it is often easy to feel helpless and hopeless about the sense of alienation we are experiencing in the United States today. As Michael Lerner wrote in the Founding Editorial Statement for *Tikkun*:

> The competitive culture, the philosophy of individualism, the economic structures that encourage war of all against all-these are unacceptable perversions of human possibility. No matter how much new technology and activity a society generates, it cannot, in the long run, be stable and satisfying. Nor can it be ethically acceptable- it contradicts our deepest understanding of what is good for human beings. (p.7)

Jews are now "constituent" to American society (p.8). Lerner says they should resist further assimilation into this darker side of America. They are inside the culture, and thus have a double responsibility. First, not to be too drawn into this part of the larger culture and allow it to shape and color Jewish experiences - such as when deciding who should be honored by the Jewish communities. The second responsibility is to help bring change to the society; fix it where it's broken. For Lerner:

> The specific ways that our society rips us from connectedness with each other and from the organic cycle of life can never be acceptable to anyone rooted in the Jewish tradition. Instead, we are ethically and religiously bound to the healing, repair, and transformation of this social order (tikkun). (p.7)

A tension in prophetic Judaism comes from this insistence in maintaining both an attitude of appreciation for the wonder of what has been created in the world simultaneously with a commitment to transforming it into something better; not to become complacent nor discouraged, but realistically hopeful. Lerner and the others try to hold onto both recognition for what is good in American society and a commitment to help change what is not. On the side of positive things Lerner mentions having "an appreciation for all that is unique and wonderful in American life - most importantly, the open-heartedness and tolerance of the American people" (p.8). He also includes the fact that Jews have been treated well here and praises the democratic ideals that are part of American public discourse.

Along similar lines, Fein points out,

> Yet, along with the American dross, there is American gold. There is America's unprecedented (if still differentially available) freedom, its uncommon investment in higher education, its remarkable institutional stability, its impressive mechanisms for self-correction, the genius of its pluralism. (p.172)

He lauds the pluralism that gives America its strength as a society today, and allows Jews to be at home here without having to always deny a sense of particularity. He celebrates Jewish particularity, not as an end in itself, but as the means to a greater end - Jews participating in tikkun olam.

Fein points out that if Jews turn to other Jews and Judaism *only*

> [A]s expressions of the universal human need for solidarity, a concern for protection of the group, a comforting source of stability in a reeling world" that they will soon "wander elsewhere in search of identity and warmth. (p.176)

Communities, including communities of Jews, must stand for something, they must have purpose and reason to persist. Vibrant communities are means, not ends in themselves.

Fein is very clear about some real possibilities for such means. One example of action is for Jews to move "beyond words to works," (p.294) and do what they can in the continuing fight for civil rights in our society. Among other things, this means working to extend the benefits of pluralism to American blacks, who often still find that a "doorless wall" surrounds them instead of the "permeable boundary" Jews enjoy (p.253). Another is to participate in organizations such as Mazon, a Jewish organization which distributes money to food kitchens and other agencies fighting hunger. Mazon encourages Jews to donate 3 percent of the cost of bar or bat mitzvah (and other) celebrations, or the cost of one more guest at the Passover seder table, or donate on Yom Kippur for those whose hunger is neither voluntary, nor limited to that one day of traditional voluntary fasting (p.296).

When Pogrebin explains why she is also so drawn to the prophetic tradition in Judaism, she also expresses concern about what draws Jews together, what makes Jewish identity meaningful. She writes:

> Remember, to be morally Jewish requires doing *tzedakah* and *gemilut hesed* [acts of loving kindness] and these are actions, not just talk. The pursuit of justice is one definition of activism. It is also, as I've said, what makes and keeps us Jews. If we lose our purpose, we lose our peoplehood and become no more than an odd collection of folks with common ancestors, unique religious laws, and an uncanny potential for victimization. That's not Jewish enough for me. (p.297)

Pogrebin's regard for what kind of Jewish identity to choose is shared by many other American Jews, including myself and the others cited above. We also share her moral concerns about her choices. The prophetic tradition, with its emphasis on relationship, compassion and responsibility offers an ethically and aesthetically attractive framework within which to make those choices. They describe it as providing a way they can proudly be Jewish in America. They make a strong case for my believing that Jews who value this part of their heritage and take action to make it meaningful in their lives today will benefit, as Jews, Americans, and ultimately as human beings because by so doing, they *will* in fact be helping to bring a sense of wholeness to the world.

Educational Praxis

For examples of how the critique and vision of the prophetic tradition might be incorporated into current educational discourse and practices, I turn to David Purpel and Roger Simon. They are two educators who are presently developing ways of integrating their concerns about education, their commitment to being personally reflective and critically conscious educators and their belief in the values central to the prophetic tradition into their work. They are explicitly attempting to infuse their work in the field of education with their concerns for social justice, concerns rooted in the prophetic vision. They are doing so as university professors working in secular institutions, in the field of education. In addition, they are important to my journey to integrate my Jewish identity with my professional focus, and to this examination of contemporary issues of Jewish identity because they are each expressly working to better understand the relationships between their professional work and their own Jewish identities.

There are significant common themes within their sometimes otherwise diverse academic work. Briefly, Purpel and Simon both write of responding to the responsibility they feel as educators to fashion both vision and moral grounding for their work. In doing so, Purpel in the United States, and Simon in Canada, both draw on national ideals of democracy and interdependent pluralism as well as Jewish prophetic ideals of a society built

on a firm commitment to social justice. They provide insightful critiques of their present societies and schools, noting the predominance of competitive, materialist drives and other impediments to achieving those ideals. They express a desire to help create loving and just communities through their work as educators, communities where people acknowledge the pain caused by social injustice and work together towards developing more compassionate societies. They affirm the human impulse and capacity to create such communities and offer ways for educators to nurture these impulses. They both express the belief that there are real possibilities for schools to participate in this needed social transformation. Their approaches differ, but they share a grounding in an educational critique that seriously considers questions of purpose and meaning.

As is true for Pogrebin and Abraham Heschel, for both Simon and Purpel the process towards change involves the difficult work of meaningful, Buberian dialogue. This full, open and honest dialogue acknowledges differences in beliefs and values while attempting to find ways to affirm people's desires for connection and common ground. Engaging in this dialogue requires a strong commitment to both ongoing self reflection and taking responsibility for respectfully reaching out to other participants. For both men self reflection has included dealing with questions related to their Jewish identity, and it is to those questions I now turn.

A closer look at their work reveals contrasts and connections in their considerations of these questions. In Purpel's book The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education (1989), while strongly urging fellow educators to enrich a contemporary educational discourse now overly involved in beaurocratic and technical issues by bringing in vital moral and spiritual concerns, he does not refer to his own particular religious or ethnic identity. As he urges them to understand, share and work towards building schools that address those concerns, he adds his own educational credo and goals to the discourse.

In addition to educators developing self reflection as a potentially powerful source of educational decisions, Purpel (1993) has pointed out that it would give them a better understanding of the things that have shaped their beliefs and ideas. This knowledge and direction will also help them more thoughtfully participate in the educational and cultural dialogues around them. Such thoughtfulness will prevent educators from being confined to the current (technological and beaurocratic) educational discourse. The present discourse ultimately supports a "destructive and meaningless society" (p.27). Increasing levels of alienation, division and violence in our society are cited as indicators that our society is headed in just such a direction.

Echoing a theme in much of his work elsewhere, at this 1993 conference of Moravian Educators in Winston Salem, North

Carolina, Purpel strongly urged his fellow educators to resist unwittingly engaging in this limited educational discourse. This can be done by both reflecting and working together to "engage in the process of searching for a context of spiritual meaning for our work" (p.27). This engagement will enrich the discourse, enlarging it to take in topics vital to changing the direction our society and our schools are taking. As Purpel emphasized, "What is required more than concern for methods, practices, technologies, and techniques for raising profits, productivity, and pride is instead concern for the search for meaning, fulfillment, and communion, i.e. for matters of the spirit" (p.6).

In his later work Purpel has been more explicit about his own identity, beginning with this 1993 paper. In the way of illustrating the place of self reflection in this process, Purpel shared some of his thinking about his own experiences, growing up in a "diverse, though largely Irish Catholic urban area" as a "first generation American, the son of Russian Jewish parents who emigrated during the pogroms of the Russian Civil War in the early 1920s." Here he learned about "cultural identities as well as cultural divisions" and developed a Jewish identity "focused on cultural and political rather than religious matters" (p.19). Realizing that these experiences are "central" to his personal and professional identity and goals, he feels that it is important to continually deepen his knowledge and understanding of Jewish teachings and traditions

that relate to his work. Connecting these reflections to his work, he said:

> My professional work has been concerned with the dialectical relationship among education, society, and culture and has come to focus on moral critique of educational policies and practices. As my work has evolved I have found, to my surprise and delight, that much of my thought is resonant with particular Jewish traditions. Indeed, a major grounding of my book The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education, is Abraham Heschel's, The Prophets and in my book I attempt to describe an educational orientation for American schools in a prophetic voice. (p.20)

Indeed such grounding is clear in the book, The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education. In it Purpel describes one of his major goals of the book as being:

> to develop ideas that can serve significantly to liberate [the alienated, the poor and the disenfranchised] from poverty, bigotry and alienation; a major educational strategy for us is to develop an education aimed at those who tacitly and overtly support those policies and programs that serve to keep the poor and powerless poor and powerless. (1989, p.30)

In his (1993) speech, taking note of other religious and secular traditions and teachings which have contributed to his ideals and beliefs, Purpel also shared current questions he now has concerning "what it means to be Jewish and an American educator."

> I am concentrating on the relationship between Jewish traditions and American life which extend beyond a separatist and dualistic system in which we separate our cultural and religious consciousness as much as possible from our professional responsibilities. I am convinced that inevitably and cultural/religious orientations of any person is implicated in one's work and hence am not only

> more aware and conscious of this process but vitally interested in how I, with others might knowingly, affirmingly, and deliberately infuse Jewish thought into my work. (p.26)

One of the ways Purpel is pursuing these concerns, along with other Jewish scholars and academics is through Mifgash's periodic scholarly conferences (Appendix, Note E). His fellow participant, Roger Simon, has made his own reflections concerning his Jewish identity integral to his professional work. His language and his concerns clearly demonstrate that there is diversity in the discourse about Jewish identity among educators, even among Jewish educators dedicated to acting on the prophetic vision.

Simon (1992) is an educator and critical theorist who draws on Heschel's ideas of compassionate justice in his own book Teaching Against the Grain. Simon details his efforts to develop a praxis that reflects his responsibility as an educator to develop "teaching and research rooted in specific commitments to enhancing the degree of justice and compassion present" (p.xv) in his community. He points out that in the world today, "The unprecedented threat to the life-sustaining biosphere, massive global armament, constant wide-spread economic and social dislocations, and mediated displays of pain, hunger and cruelty are more than enough to try one's sanity" (p.4).

The book details his attempts to develop a "pedagogy of possibility, one that works for the reconstruction of social imagination in the service of human freedom" (p.4). In this

work Simon seeks knowledge that will help educators and others create a society where "diversity and dignity [might] flourish within an ethos of care and cooperation" (p.26). Both prophetic social critique linking morality and politics and prophetic commitment to compassionate justice are part of the framework for this pedagogy. In the preface Simon expresses the hope that "the partial perspective presented here help[s] in fashioning educational practices that enable people to alter the terms on which their lives are lived in favor of a life sustaining, just, and compassionate community" (p.xviii).

In describing that partiality, Simon acknowledges his sometimes privileged locations within today's capitalist, complex, pluralistic society. He describes himself, among other things, as "an Askenazi Jew, white, male" (p.5) and notes his "commitment and investment in addressing my work from within a continuing attempt to understand what it means for me to be a Jew" (p.6). Here, and elsewhere (1987, in press a, in press b) Simon continues this effort. In one piece he responds to the old Jewish saying, "Forgetting leads to exile, remembering leads to redemption" (cited by Simon, in press b, p.1) by working to develop dialogic ways of remembering, views of history and pedagogies of commemoration that seek justice for those remembered and those remembering.

Another example is represented in "Being Ethnic/Doing Ethnicity: a Response to Corrigan". In this 1987 piece being Jewish enhances Simon's ability to give "autobiographical

concreteness" to his theorizing about relationships between various conceptions of ethnicity and possibilities for people to "be more" by "finding ways to confront, subvert, and finally transcend forms of dominance that limit, suppress, distort, and ...silence" (p.31). He is especially interested in how social organizations of space and time strengthen or resist such dominance. His examples and analyses of his "lived contradictions" (p.42) as someone who is sometimes Other in his society - out of synch in space and/or time with the dominant nonJewish part of his society - masterfully illustrate the complexity of modern social identity. Simon brings this discussion of the multiplicity of identities for someone who is Jewish today, a topic explored by Fein, Pogrebin and others, into serious educational discourse.

In another piece, Simon (in press a) explores how those complexities, and bringing his "postmodern Jewish identity" into his educational practice might affect his relationships with graduate students. Exploring "the difference that difference makes for the complex dynamics of pedagogy" (p.4), he analyzes some of the ways in which his decision to "teach as a Jew" would introduce an element of difference. To so teach would

> [M]ean refusing to leave my difference at the door. Neither an "ethnic" recovery nor testimony, such pedagogy will challenge students to forego closure on their conceptions of Jewish identity while I visibly produce myself as a Jew through an engagement with contemporary, historical, and traditional "texts" which inform Jewish life. It will require that I teach how I read these texts against the grain of contemporary predicaments, forming dialectical constellations between various Jewish

> perspectives and the postcolonial aspirations of a diasporic world. (p.19)

Simon's hope is that this encounter with alterity would open dialogic opportunities that don't presently exist for faculty and students to learn about "the other". It is also his hope that his decision to openly bring his particular Jewish body and identity into his educator's role will counter "current abstractions about Jewish identity" (p.21) that posit "the (conceptual) Jew" in stereotypically anti-Semitic ways. In addition, it is designed to remind members of "the Jewish community" of the "multiplicity of Jews that exist" (p.22).

I consider Simon and Purpel good examples of this multiplicity. Working primarily within secular, multicultural academic communities, they are acutely aware of the potential for "confrontation and conflict" that might follow from current reflections on our "variety of identities" (Purpel, 1993, p.13). Still, they maintain their faith in people's "capacity to celebrate diversity and difference while working to create a world of harmony, peace and justice" (p.21). To nourish the hopes of present day educators and help them imagine and plan ways in which they might begin to contribute their own concrete efforts towards this goal, both Simon and Purpel offer other specific examples of how this work might go forth in schools.

Purpel (1989) describes several examples in both public and private schools where such work is going on. Two examples are the community service programs integral to the network of Sacred

Heart schools and the democratic student governance system in a particular Massachusetts school. He both celebrates these examples and reminds educators of how much hard work remains for schools to be transformed into places where people make more of a contribution to creating a good and just world than is now the case. He suggests that one important way for educators to do this is for them to work on implementing curriculums with more of an emphasis on responding to the significant problems of our times.

> Fundamentally our position is that educators must particularly and concretely respond to the questions of how we can create a culture of abundance, joy, freedom, justice, and peace. This is the central cluster of questions that we as educators must confront and transmit to our students. It would perhaps be more appropriate for educators to transmit the culture's most important questions than their responses, since it seems that our questions are more pertinent and valid than our answers. It is right to ask how to build a culture of abundance, but there is little reason to believe that we have anything like that kind of clarity when it comes to answers. I would also say that we as educators are likely to find greater opportunity for consensus on what are the more important questions than on the answers. We can be united by our questions even as we are divided by our answers. (Purpel, 1989, pp.154-155)

Purpel makes a good case for believing that responses to such questions might well lead educators to work together to develop curricula which are more inter-disciplinary and more serious about helping students develop both compassion and critical thinking skills. Ultimately, responding to those questions might well be transformative as it turns our current situation in the United States away from its present direction

of increasing social alienation, economic dislocation and political cynicism. I believe that this effort of working together is clearly going to require the self-reflection and dialogue Purpel has engaged in with the Moravian educators. I share his hope that such dialogues will help educators learn to be articulate leaders in educational and cultural discourse about who "we" are in our society, where we came from and where we are headed - and which educational policies and practices we should be involved in.

Likewise, I share Simon's hope that publicly grounding one's own participation in educational discourse in self-reflection about identity and educational possibilities will help other educators develop theories and practices aimed at enhancing human dignity, as it has helped him. I admire both his candor that "there are no easy solutions" (1989, p.141) to the challenge of how to communicate in a public forum about educational practices from within a particular identity (in this case being a Jew "engaged in his own tradition") and his willingness to thoughtfully continue his efforts to do just that.

The "infusion" of Jewish thought and Jewish participation in the development of Western and American culture present in Simon's work makes his social and educational critique richer and more subtle. His contribution to current educational discourse is distinctive and reflective of both the complexity and connections inherent in "our" North American cultural

heritage. He is contributing as well to the diverse, ongoing discourse concerning Jewish identity. I appreciate his thoughtful participation in both; speaking with him and reading his work invariably deepens and enriches my own reflections and participation.

Finally, I appreciate his concrete examples of ways to "brush" [after Walter Benjamin] or "read" canonical texts in literature, historical situations, and personal experiences "against the grain" for their ability to reveal new understandings of those liberating educational possibilities.

These possibilities are better understood when there is a critical awareness of how the dialectics between culture, education and identity get played out in specific situations. In this chapter I have specifically explored ways in which contemporary Jews are caught up in these dialectics, especially those Jews for whom the prophetic tradition is an important part of their Jewish identity. Their views of possibilities for tikkun olam now inform my own.

In the next chapter I will return to my original questions within the two discourses, one concerning meaningful contemporary Jewish identities and the other concerning education and American identities. Synthesizing what I have learned in this investigation, in this final chapter I seek to articulate more clearly positions for myself as an individual educator engaged in these multiple discourses. In addition, I seek to develop additional recommendations for other American

educators, so that they too might work towards enhancing possibilities for social justice in their/our schools and society. I will also clarify directions for further inquiry to help us better understand both the dialectics and how to help realize the possibilities.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

I began this inquiry with a discussion of some of the conceptual issues connected to historical and contemporary ideas of identity and their relationship to issues involved in multicultural education. In the next two chapters I presented a personal narrative, placing my own personal and professional experiences within the larger context of Jewish identity and experiences in the United States. In particular, I investigated Judaism's prophetic tradition and the work of several contemporary educators and feminists whose praxis is informed by this tradition. In this chapter I want to speak directly to where I am now in my views on the general issue of cultural identity and the particular matter of multicultural education.

This investigation of the dialectic between cultural identity and educational issues has led to a strengthening and to a deeper understanding of my own Jewish identity. I have come to realize how much my responses to these issues, including those connected to multicultural education, flow from my particular Jewish consciousness. Therefore, any concluding explanation of those responses must be preceded here by some articulation of that position.

There are important benefits to my doing this. First of all, the act of writing is a creative one which helps me think through and better understand my position. I believe that this is a valuable undertaking for any educator, in part because it will lead to better informed, more humane professional choices and practices. Therefore, I encourage my fellow educators to engage in their own searches for self-understanding. I envision this process as part of our individual engagement in substantive dialogue about our educational praxis and goals. Being in a dialogic relationship also involves seeking to understand where others are speaking from.

This investigation is part of my contribution to that discourse. It is my sincere hope that it helps readers to participate likewise in our educational discourse in a more knowledgeable way. I believe that this will lead to a more meaningful discourse, one that goes beyond technical and beaurocratic issues to more substantive issues concerning the purposes and goals of public education. Establishing of such a dialogic relationship among educators is a necessary step in our working towards a just society, one based on respect for our diverse cultural, ethnic identities, our shared humanity and a common commitment to furthering America's democratic ideals.

To explain what I do because I am Jewish in this academic forum is still not an easy task, however. Although I am convinced that its inclusion is appropriate, I proceed with some trepidation. I feel a sense of vulnerability about bringing my

interpretations of Jewish ideals and ideas into academic discourse. It is my fervent hope that any discussion or critique of those ideals and ideas, my interpretations of them and my decision to explicitly bring them into this forum helps us work together towards our democratic commitment. In addition, I hesitate because some of my grounding beliefs are problematic, tentative and in flux. They contain conflicts and are subject to change and evolution. Elucidating them continues to be a complex process. The search for clarity, cohesion and confidence is ongoing.

Despite these difficulties, there are some parts of this aspect of my cultural identity that are fairly clear to me at this time. To begin with, as a Jew I struggle with the question of the existence of God, but affirm a spiritual dimension to human being and to being Jewish. I believe that all people are called upon to create a world of justice, harmony and peace. Responding to this call gives purpose and meaning to our existence. My own response is shaped by the language developed by my Jewish ancestors and contemporaries. The sense of responsibility I feel for engaging in *tikkun olam*, healing and repairing the world, comes from them. They are the source of my conviction that human beings can truly transform the world, and the related assertion that we should carefully consider the moral implications of our actions. By our actions we either help or hinder such transformations in the future.

In a related vein, it is to these Jewish roots that I trace my assertion that the divisive, alienating situations we find in the world today are neither inevitable nor immutable. They remind me that despite the injustices I see about me, human beings have great potential and capacity to bring about a more just and peaceful present and future. Conversely, the fact that the society I live in often does not nurture this potential or help us more fully develop this capacity also speaks to our humanity. Part of being human is to be fallible, to miss the mark we are capable of making, even to turn away instead of responding.

When faced with human fallibility, I am reminded of the Jewish tradition that emphasizes repentance and return. When we accept responsibility for responding to the call for *tikkun olam*, we are turning back - returning. Having personally rejected the tradition that posits a separatist Orthodoxy as the only authentically Jewish way to return, I join those who are presently working to interpret this heritage of Jewish ideas in ways that make sense both in the United States and in the larger world today. By this, I mean that we are engaged in efforts to develop ways of helping us live towards these commitments as Jews, even as we affirm our support for and involvement in our democratic, secular, multicultural society. Traditional Jewish values concerning the sanctity of human life are being

consciously reconstructed into practices and beliefs supportive of this doubled commitment.

For me, this struggle includes my work as an educator. Although it is not always clear to me how to do so in our present schools and society, it is evident to me that my work *ought* to be connected to helping increase the wisdom and justice present in schools and society. Were we wiser and more just, I believe, our society would generally reflect greater respect for people, a greater sense of wonder and awe at the grandeur of the world and the creative power of human potential to affect that world. There would also be promotion of a more pluralistic and inclusive community truly dedicated to "liberty and justice for all." Educators would be encouraged to help young people develop both critical consciousness and commitment to social justice. I continue to search for beneficial ways to bring these concerns (and the Jewish identity they are part of) into my professional life.

In addition to the heritage of ideas I draw on, as a Jew I also seek out and affirm my connections with Jewish people. I feel a kinship with those who came before me and those who will follow as well as with my contemporaries. We often share historical, religious and ethnic traditions as well as this rich legacy of Jewish ideas and ideals. My needs for "recognition, association and protection" (West, 1992b, p.20) are often met by my relationships with other Jews. I enjoy participating in life

cycle and calendar events with them. These shared experiences give structure and meaning to my life. It both comforts and energizes me to join other Jews at these times, especially those who recognize the need to transform some of the traditions in order to make them meaningful today. This makes this search sound more simple than it is, however. The connections binding me to other Jews are textured and complex. I choose to recognize the existence of these bonds, even as I acknowledge their fluid nature. I find that they often vary in strength along other lines of our identities.

Part of this search also includes pursuing connections to Jews who lived at other times, under other conditions. I include those Jews whose lives were shaped by their being Jewish in ways I have not personally experienced. Among them I include those Jews who throughout history were excluded, exiled and even killed because they were Jewish in times and places where this label provided sufficient legal justification for such actions. Knowing that they didn't have the opportunities, the freedom and choices I do, I want my decisions to be good ones. In much the same way, I also look to my biblical ancestors. While the contexts of their times were also different from mine, their struggles within the intertwined issues of identity and morality often inform my own.

These historical connections also fuel my desires to actively participate in fighting the evils of contemporary anti-Semitism and other threats to the survival of Jews. Physical

survival is a necessary but not sufficient condition for such survival, especially in the United States today. A communal sense of purpose and meaning are also needed. These historical connections nurture my desire to work with other Jews, taking advantage of the opportunities we have today to delineate, from within, this sense of who we are. As eminent Jewish sociologist Arthur Hertzberg points out, the survival of any sense of (Jewish) community persists only "because of what it affirms and believes" (p.386).

This opportunity is both invigorating and daunting. It is invigorating to live in a time and place where such self determination is possible. We have choices denied Jews in many other times and places. In the United States today Jews make these decisions from positions of relative security and prosperity. However, the process is not easy. We are finding that it is difficult to maintain any Jewish sense of community in a time and place where most Jews are fully assimilated and integrated into their surrounding secular society. They are Americans as well as Jews. In many ways they embody the fluidity and complexity of contemporary cultural identities. In this context, it is not surprising that American Jews continue to develop a widening variety of ways of interpreting and acting on their Jewish identities. Tensions that exist within the very Jewish traditions that ground contemporary Jewish identities add another layer of complexity to those identities.

There is a story from my own life that may help illustrate this. Friday evenings I light Shabbat (Sabbath) candles. I find that doing so helps usher this "sanctuary in time" into my home. It is a traditional ritual for Jewish women. However, it was not something done in my home when I was growing up. Nor was it common in my friends' homes. It was ignored as something old fashioned and European- out of step with our time and place. Some of our third wave immigrant grandmothers lit candles, at least at festival times; but our modern American mothers seldom did so. For some of our mothers, it was part of a stifling traditional Shabbat they had rebelled against as young people. For others, it was something their own mothers had already abandoned. Setting aside a day for religious reflection and separation from the secular work-a-day world had lost out to American engagements and entertainments. My "unaffiliated" (Bershtel and Graubard, p.11), assimilated friends and I grew up participating in secular weekends, rather than religious Shabbats. We felt fortunate not to be constrained by such outmoded Jewish traditions. As we grew up, traditions such as lighting candles to usher in Shabbat seemed too unimportant to investigate.

Later, this uninformed, ethnically centered "Jewish by association" (Neusner, p.313) form of Jewish identity was severely challenged when I lived in a small town in Maine with my husband and young sons. My search for ways to make being Jewish a positive, meaningful part of our lives in a place where

we were the only Jews, led me to books, to distant synagogues on religious holidays and to my first visit to the Jewish Museum in New York City.

I found the museum to be an impressive yet accessible place. The historical and contemporary exhibits included secular and religious artifacts, art work and poetry from around the world. I learned a lot there, including the fact that I was missing much of my heritage by not knowing Hebrew or Yiddish. In general, however, the exhibits helped fill in some other holes in my education. The holes had been left by my assimilationist family and the American schools I had attended. At the museum, I learned about both common threads and unique ones woven into the fabric of a richly textured Jewish heritage. Just as importantly, I was sensitized to new possibilities as far as my connections to this heritage. I felt that I had been personally invited to connect to the variety of experiences displayed there. The diversity exhibited there expanded my conceptions of how one might make such connections.

Among the other people at the museum that day were two teenage Hasidic girls. They sat together on a bench in a lobby, quietly chatting and giggling. On the floor beside them were two large shopping bags. I passed them several times as I went back and forth to various exhibits. When I first noticed the girls, with their neatly arranged long hair, modest, high necked, long sleeved dresses and sensible shoes, they reminded me of girls I had seen in my grandparents' old family photos.

In some ways they seemed to be part of a familiar historical tableau in the museum. However, their appearance also led me to distance myself from them. Their distinctive appearance indicated that they were Hasidic Jews. I had never personally known any Hasidic Jews, and in fact knew little of how they viewed their lives. However, in my life the Hasidim had always appeared to be simultaneously annoyingly arrogant in their claims for Jewish authenticity and insular, insensitive and backward in their ultra-Orthodox interpretations of Judaism. Despite this, I felt a pang of pity for these young women. Knowing of the Hasidic adherence to a life based on an extremely conservative interpretation of Halakah (Rabbinic law), I felt that their parents had chosen a narrow, outdated path for them to follow. I thought about all the missed opportunities and experiences their restrictive way of life entailed.

These young women might well be colorful, living threads in the rich tapestry of Jewish experiences, but I was unsure of what we truly shared beyond our European ancestry, our stubborn insistence on identifying ourselves as Jews, and our mutual suspicion that the other was missing a vital piece of what being Jewish in twentieth century America ought to involve. However, in some ways our all being there seemed fitting. In a sense we embodied the contemporary "diversity of American Jewry" noted by sociologist Jack Kugelmass (p.2). As part of my complex reaction to these girls, I even felt a whiff of envy for the superior knowledge of Hebrew and Yiddish they undoubtedly had.

At the same time, I was aware that this familiarity with non-English languages was fostered by a stronger resistance to assimilation than I had ever experienced or desired. I was, once again, reminded of the co-mingling of religion and culture in people's Jewish identity. Despite our differences, in this place I felt a gentle tug of the threads connecting us and connecting us to what was on display. I wondered if the girls felt these tugs, too. I wondered what they thought of the exhibits in the museum. I wondered if they were as impressed as I with the diversity and depth displayed. I wondered, but kept my distance.

Today I consider myself lucky that these young women were more willing to reach out than I was. As I stood there in the hallway, contemplating which direction to go in, one of them approached me. She asked if I were Jewish. When I said, "Yes," she asked if I lit Shabbat candles. When I replied that I did not, she reached into one of the shopping bags and drew out two simple candlesticks, a few candles and a pamphlet explaining the traditional Shabbat candle lighting ceremony and prayers. She politely, almost shyly, offered them to me. All she asked was that I agree to try it once. Had the offer been made some other time or in some other place, for example, at a shopping mall, or in a park, I might have rejected the offer out of hand as something that would not "fit" into my life. However, that afternoon in the Jewish Museum, I found that I could not dismiss these young women. Suddenly, I was glad that some Jews had kept

this tradition alive and available. At that moment, lighting Shabbat candles seemed to be an authentically Jewish way to extend into my life and my home the connections I was feeling there.

I accepted the offer, and found that I liked the ways it affected the atmosphere in my home that Friday night. I continued lighting candles, and Friday evenings developed into a special time for us. Through the years, lighting the candles has been one of the times when I consistently felt close to my family and to countless other Jewish women who have lit and continue to light Shabbat candles and think about loved ones. It has also provided me with an ongoing opportunity to struggle with spiritual concerns. The process inevitably engages me in dealing with the possibilities of prayer.

These two young women are also sometimes in my thoughts when I light the candles. My ambivalence towards them still runs deep. I am grateful to them for reminding me of the inevitability of diversity within any group of people, including Americans, Jews and Hasidic Jews. For example, among the Hasidim, the Lubavitcher, the most prominant sect, have outreach programs and policies, such as the one which brought me together with these young women, while others do not. I benefited from this particular encounter with diversity. It altered my perspective about Hasidic Jews and heightened my awareness of the fluidity of connections among Jews with different perspectives. More globally, I was also reminded of the

difficulties inherent in both delineating group characteristics and describing relationships between members of various groups.

At the same time, it was also part of an encounter with commonality. I am grateful to these young women for bringing me to this part of our shared Jewish tradition. I am proud to join them in its perpetuation. My life has been enriched because they reached out to me. I am glad they did so, despite the feeling that their reaching out was not to initiate dialogue. A limitation of our encounter is that they offered to share a piece of their Jewish identities, without seeking to understand or share any of mine. They were not seeking any contributions I might make to their own understandings or practices. While I feel that I gained because they acted in accordance with their convictions about what one should do as a Jew, I feel it is important to note that I neither agree with nor support all their group's convictions.

Despite the fact that I feel called upon to defend Hasidim and other different-from-me yet fellow Jews when they/we are attacked, sometimes I also struggle to feel a shared Jewish "we". Choosing how to "do the right thing" is a complex process. There is often a great distance between our choices. We are choosing many ways to live as American Jews. These choices make our lives so different that I suspect that some of us would find it difficult to share the same neighborhood. Part of my struggle is that at the same time I persist in claiming some kinship and peoplehood with these young women in the museum

and other Orthodox Jews, I often continue to feel distanced from them.

Part of this distancing is because they follow Halakah more literally than I. Sometimes I wonder why Orthodox women follow current (Orthodox) interpretations of the law that still relegate women to an inferior, outsider status. I firmly reject Orthodox claims to exclusive "Jewish authenticity" (Glazer, p.40) because I believe they too often include a truncated sense of the Jewish "ethical mandate" (Pogrebin, p.55) to pursue compassion and justice. I would like them to extend their considerable passion and commitment to tradition to better include gender equality issues. I would also like them to include a wider range of their fellow Americans in their considerations. Just as there are moments of connection, there are also times when my patience and understanding cannot stretch from my own interpretation of how one ought to behave because one is Jewish to theirs'.

Ultimately, however, I feel that I must continue to do just that. I strive to approach them with humility, not hubris. We might learn something from each other. As Jews, we are both enjoined to love and respect each other despite our differences. Jewish ethical language speaks about the necessity for us to strive to create a world where the dignity of all individuals is honored; others' as well as our own. The sense of justice grounded in this injunction has traditionally been extended beyond Jews- to all human beings. Undoubtedly, tikkun olam

would be furthered by our acting on this commitment. As part of this effort, I affirm the strength of other connections I seek. I am committed to working with other educators to create and support a humane, pluralistic society.

The point of view I have just described thus becomes the starting point for my views on multiculturalism and multicultural education. *It is my view that the United States of America is a nation in which we, the people, presently have an opportunity to celebrate our diversity while affirming a common commitment to our fundamental democratic ideals.* I have come to believe that "celebrating" confuses us, and that we therefore resist it. We find it easier being passively entertained than engaging in celebration. I am turning here to Abraham Heschel's (1965) eloquent description of celebration as, "giving attention to the transcendent meaning" (p.117) of our actions; actively appreciating, respecting the "sublime or solemn aspects of living." Celebrating this way reminds us of the impact, the power of human actions on the world. It reminds us to "be alert and open to what is happening" (p.116) in this particular, unique moment of time.

We are sometimes frightened by the responsibilities connected to such celebrating, and in turn, by the possibilities inherent in this opportunity. We do not know how to interpret the opportunity. We feel unready, unable to respond. This is an opportunity filled with uncertainty. We find little

historical or contemporary guidance for successfully facing it. As has been true in other modern nations, our diversity has more often been thought of as something to be feared and eliminated than as a characteristic of our society to be celebrated. Any affirmation of ideals in today's turbulent times demands a thoughtful critique and re-view of this tradition. This dissertation is part of my own engagement with its issues.

In interpreting the fundamental democratic ideals of justice and equality, in some ways I continue to agree with politically conservative social theorists, such as Schlesinger. I do so, despite the fact that their position also promotes forms of uniformity and assimilation I consider un-democratic. I find myself unable to reject their arguments out of hand because I recognize the difficulties of getting individual people to democratically work together if they have no sense of "we-ness", no sense that they are alike in some important ways. Related to this, one of the things participants must share is knowledge of and investment in the democratic process. In addition, I share their conviction that few in this nation will benefit from further Balkanization along reified ethnic, racial, economic or geographic lines. I continue to fear that truly establishing and sustaining a society characterized by respect for all individuals may be too difficult a task for people grounded in a politics that emphasizes differences between groups of people over our shared humanity and citizenship. However, I believe it is also important to seriously consider

the arguments of social theorists such as Bauman, Taylor, Spring and Zinn. They remind us of the oppression, exclusion and xenophobia that has often accompanied the establishment and maintenance of national identities. National identities have often been built through the exertion of oppressive social and political assimilationist pressures on diverse peoples.

In further recognition of the complexities of the situation, I am also compelled by an observation by Bauman in Modernity and Ambivalence. In this book he points out that the negative aspects inherent in strong (assimilationist) modern national identities have historically also been intertwined with a strong, positive social commitment to providing a decent life for everyone. I am convinced that we ought to reclaim this commitment. We should do so, as part of our resistance to current efforts within the United States to emphasize "Otherness" and differences among us in ways that privatize and "desocialize" our burgeoning social problems (Bauman, p.261). By any measure, we are an immensely wealthy nation and I believe that we can do better at decreasing human suffering without promoting either the oppression or the sense of exclusivity that have historically been associated with assimilation. We, as a people and a nation need to devise ways of respecting much of our diversity while responding to our traditional societal concerns about the general welfare of our people. It is actual, living people who embody that diversity, and it is through social affirmation of their dignity and claims for justice that

we demonstrate this concern and our commitment to democratic ideals.

One of the ways we might work towards this is to struggle to understand and accept the complexity of that diversity, and indeed of people's cultural identities. This should include recognition of the reality that people's identities are dialogically constructed within imposed frameworks. There is both firmness and fluidity to cultural identity. For example, I am *always* a human being who is, among other things, female, American and Jewish. However, my responses to particular, specific situations are shaped by the fluidity that flows from both the compound nature of my identity and its ongoing social construction. The recognition or celebration of diversity I am proposing precludes consideration of an individual exclusively as a member of any one particular group, (including the undifferentiated group "human beings",) thereby, in effect severing this person's other ties. It also recognizes that affirmation of "a common commitment to our fundamental democratic ideals" requires our continual engagement in dialogue within a framework of social justice for all. It is part of the transformative work necessary for such affirmation.

Therefore, I agree with the Spindlers' conclusion that the American people would best be served by an expansion of participation in the "American cultural dialogue". Any celebration of diversity should be linked to including more

people in this dialogue about American ideals and values. By turning towards each other with respect and concern, we can best demonstrate our commitments to the joined democratic ideals of freedom and social responsibility.

From my perspective, these ideals are resonant with Jewish teachings and traditions - particularly those concerned with justice, compassion and social agency. I will continue developing ways of grounding my life and my work as an educator in these ideals and traditions. Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's (1965) reminder that only those "who are capable of truly saying *Thou* to one another can truly say *We* with one another" (p.176) is basic to my understanding of human relationship. This concept, *We,* is one that crosses ethnic, racial, political, economic and gender lines. It also grounds my ideas concerning possibilities for celebration of diversity and re-commitment to the ideals of democratic society.

From an educator's point of view, my experience with the Hasidic young women provides a useful starting point for an approach, or model, for learning how to participate in this celebration and re-commitment. The experience came to be a kind of personal paradigm for how we might begin to deal with our ambivalence concerning the pluralism we experience socially. This pluralism gets played out in the Jewish community and in the larger, even more complex American society. Briefly, this model demonstrates to me the importance of being open to new

possibilities and recognizes the importance of exploring, pursuing knowledge about ourselves and others. It also recognizes the importance of reflection and self- understanding about the "multiple positions" (West, 1992b) of our cultural identities. It acknowledges that connection is best achieved when people approach each other in humility and good faith. It celebrates human possibility even as it accepts human fallibility. It recognizes both the possibilities for visceral, non-rational reactions to others who are seen as different, and the possibilities of tempering these reactions through personal contact. It also recognizes that when we do meet others we are likely to experience both commonality and difference. It emphasizes the necessity for communication, sharing and transcending some differences while acknowledging that inevitably some things will neither be shared nor transcended. The model speaks to the human hope for reciprocity in relationship even as it makes clear inherent difficulties of this process. I do not wish to romanticize the experience. There are no easy solutions, only contextualized choices which continually shape our responses. This opportunity for celebration and affirmation is also a long range, continuous struggle.

These are the basic reasons why our meeting is a model for a starting point. The encounter itself was brief, however far reaching its effects have been for me. Dialogic relationship may begin this way, but it also continues over time. It is

ongoing. It is sustained by respect for self and others and desire for connection and understanding. Buber (1965) describes "inclusion" (p.97) or the underlying desire to experience "the other side" (p.96) in dialogic relation. This involves living through a common event from both one's own "felt reality" and "from the standpoint of the other" (p.97). I believe that knowing what it feels like to walk in another's shoes as well as one's own is difficult, if not impossible to achieve. Despite this, I find that Buber's respect for openness and mutuality represent ways of relating and communicating which hold great potential for grounding a serious engagement in the struggle for social transformation.

Maintaining the complex dialogic relationship depends on what Sharon Welch (1991) has referred to as "solidarity" (p.95). I find her analysis helpful, even as I extend it into my own interpretation of diversity. For Welch, the first aspect of solidarity is granting others "sufficient respect to listen to their ideas and to be challenged by them" (p.95). These things are all vital to the continuation of the relationship. However, respectfully listening and remaining open to the challenging ideas of others are attitudes and actions often difficult to sustain. As writer and social activist Letty Cottin Pogrebin has learned, no matter how much good faith people bring to a dialogic relationship, "On certain subjects, it takes a concerted effort just to hear each other out" (p.279). It is sometimes difficult to be quiet and listen when we have

something important to say. It is also difficult to not interrupt people with whom we disagree. We sometimes dismiss those commonalties of identity which might sustain a sense of reciprocal respect. We have a tendency to resist hearing the pain behind injustices recounted in anger toward us. We may not understand the challenge, or we may resist or refuse the challenge of considering ideas which force us to think differently about ourselves and others. Our sense of respect for other people must lead us to compassionately attend to their concerns.

Welch's second aspect of solidarity provides another reminder why we should persevere in our attempts. It points out that our lives, and the various groups we belong to "are so intertwined that each is accountable to the other" (p.95). It is clear to me that considering ourselves accountable to each other is an important part of both dialogic relationships and the larger project of finding ways to "create and support a humane, pluralistic society."

This will require a change of consciousness in our society. We will have to re-conceptualize who we are and the nature of our present and possible relationships. I believe that educators should consider what they can do to help bring about this change. We must deepen current discourse about education. We must model engagement in reflective and thoughtful dialogue. We must show how we value critical consciousness and commitment to upholding human dignity. For educators this larger project

includes designing and supporting practices that help our colleagues, our students, and us know ourselves and others in ways that will encourage us to use this knowledge wisely.

This project ought to be the process and goal of multicultural education and can serve as the framework for the further development of a pluralistic and humane America. It calls for learning how to engage in open dialogue concerning the differences among us. Such a dialogue calls for reducing the stridency and hardening of hearts that increasingly has characterized this particular discourse. The cause of social justice will best be served through a renewed commitment to this process of dialogue. Through their work, educators should be helping (themselves and other) Americans develop a greater sense of responsibility and reciprocity, a greater desire for compassion and commitment to solidarity.

I believe that one of the most difficult aspects of multicultural education is that an important part of creating a more just society is learning to critique conceptions of cultural differences apparently related to race, ethnicity, gender, et al. and acknowledge the significant ways in which they continue to shape all Americans' experiences, while also learning to recognize the potential for connection through the various dimensions of our identities. Perhaps we might fear diversity less if we were more knowledgeable and optimistic about possibilities of forging important bonds across our shared identities. Finally, multicultural education should also

challenge people to question other obstacles to those bonds, obstacles such as misogyny and anti-Semitism.

Multicultural education, should therefore be best thought of as a theoretical framework for providing opportunities for people to become more knowledgeable and reflective about their own identities, and those of others. Towards this goal, I support programs and practices that encourage educators (and their students through them) to become reflective about their own experiences and expectations in ways which always connect these reflections to the experiences of others.

Interpretations of our own experiences are much more textured and meaningful when rubbed against the necessarily different experiences of other people. We learn much more about the cultural meaning of our own race, ethnicity and gender as we learn more of the experiences of people whose race, ethnicity or gender are not like our own. A greater understanding of the impact of people's race, ethnicity or gender on these experiences comes from analyzing them in terms of the rhetoric and ideals that form the common ground for our cultural dialogue. We have to care for each other enough to engage in dialogue and respond to claims for justice and a decent life. If our "multicultural education" critique is conducted with both rigor and a sense of hope and possibility, I believe that it might also lead to a renewed commitment to that dialogue.

Multicultural education, understood this way, will best support this dialogue when it is infused throughout what we

teach in our schools. I disagree with multicultural education proponent James Banks (1993) when he calls for establishing it as yet another academic discipline, akin to sociology and anthropology, complete with "minimum standards for practice" and "standards and guidelines for multicultural professionals" (p.10). He astutely points out that sometimes "painful and unsettling" "self-analysis" and "self-introspection" are integral to students developing the kind of "transformational knowledge" that will "help citizens improve society" (p.11). He writes: "Multicultural education asks students to examine some of their latent and unexamined attitudes, beliefs, feelings and assumptions about U.S. society and culture. Students often find this process a difficult and painful one" (p.11). He finds the process potentially disturbing to the students because it is so out of step with what they are experiencing in the rest of their teacher education.

I agree. My students have often resisted my efforts to convince them of the value of this type of situated reflection. However, I feel that Banks ignores an important part of the process when he does not discuss what type of relationships among teachers and students would encourage the students to engage in this difficult learning process. It is my experience that when students do engage, it is most often due to the dialogic relationships we are struggling to establish in the classroom. Banks wants to ensure that the teachers in charge of the process of reflection are experts in the field of

multicultural education. I find that a teacher's understanding of the social construction of knowledge and commitment to social change which Banks is concerned with to be necessary but not sufficient conditions for a truly transformative educational praxis. We must insist that deeper understandings of the power of human agency, compassion and hope be included in the discourse about multicultural education.

It is more than the intellectual act of understanding that moves us to remain in the dialogue with others. For true transformation, we must insist the multicultural education taps the powers of human agency, compassion and hope that come from our impulse to connect with other people. Our commitment to openness as well as our sense of social justice are fueled by our feelings of concern. This concern is for ourselves, for other individuals and for the world we help create. This is educational praxis based on the power of the human spirit.

The obstacles to bringing about these changes are formidable and well known. Among them, educators are well aware of the fact that our schools often "mirror" the conditions in society rather than "light the way". My involvement in several teacher education programs has given me an appreciation for how difficult it is to introduce the processes of situated reflection, critique and dialogue into our present schools of teacher education. It is sometimes a struggle to maintain my own sense of hope about the possibilities of meaningful changes in American public schools and my own ability to participate in

those changes. What is clear to me at this point is that my commitment to continue trying has been strengthened through my serious engagement in analysis and self-reflection, including here in this dissertation.

The obstacles often seem insurmountable, and educators are well aware of our conflicts, confusions and the reality of human fallibility. Despite these difficulties, I urge my fellow educators to the challenge as an opportunity for celebration and affirmation. As educated Americans we can do no less. Behind my entreaty echoes the reminder of ancient sage, Rabbi Tarfon who said, "You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you at liberty to abstain from it."

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APPENDIX

Notes

Note A - In Chapter One of their book, The Spindlers define cultural dialogue as "culturally phrased expressions of meaning referent to pivotal concerns" such as "individual achievement and community, equality, conformity and difference, honesty and expediency, and success and failure" (p.1).

Note B - Bauman credits the first sentence in this passage to Boyd C. Shafer (1955) Nationalism, myth and reality (p.119), London: Gollancz. In addition, following the statement concerning "the holy union", Bauman has a footnote citing Peter Alter's (1989) Nationalism (p.7ff), translated by Stuart McKinnon-Evans, London: Edward Arnold.

Note C - Harry Gersh (1968) describes the development of part of this official discourse. "Over a period of three thousand years, the Jews added book to book to book. The Torah (the first five books of the Bible) was extended by the books of the Prophets and explicated by the Writings. The Law of the Bible was extended by the Oral Law, broadened by the Mishnah, which was in turn interpreted by the Gemarah, and retold in analogy in the Midrash. These were explained in the Responsa, amplified by the Commentaries, ordered by the Codes, given depth in philosophical works, made ritual in the Siddur, and made magic in the Zohar" (p.12).

Jewish law, or Halakah, is further explained by Judith Plaskow (1990) as "literally 'the way'. Jewish law, encompassing both the oral and written Torah" (p.269) developed by the sages and rabbis over time.

Note D - Mehitzah. The mehitzah is "the partition separating men and women in traditional synagogues" (Plaskow, p.270). Its purpose is to block the sight and sound of women from the men as the men carry out the mitzvahs of communal study of the Torah and prayer.

Note E - Mifgash. According to its "Statement of intent regarding proposal to hold a planning conference to establish Mifgash: an institute for the integration of Jewish learning and secular scholarship", Mifgash was initiated in response to needs expressed by Jewish academics in public institutions of higher education. These needs center around "integrating" Jewish learning and their secular scholarly work addressed to current concerns regarding teaching and learning on university campuses. They feel that Jewish learning/knowledge has religious, theological, historical and cultural components which are relevant to their professional commitments and questions of identity. The participants wish to better understand "the critical links between Jewish tradition and contemporary experience." Further information concerning Mifgash may be

obtained from Haim Dov Beliak at Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California.